No. 2036

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Commando

WAR STORIES IN PICTURES

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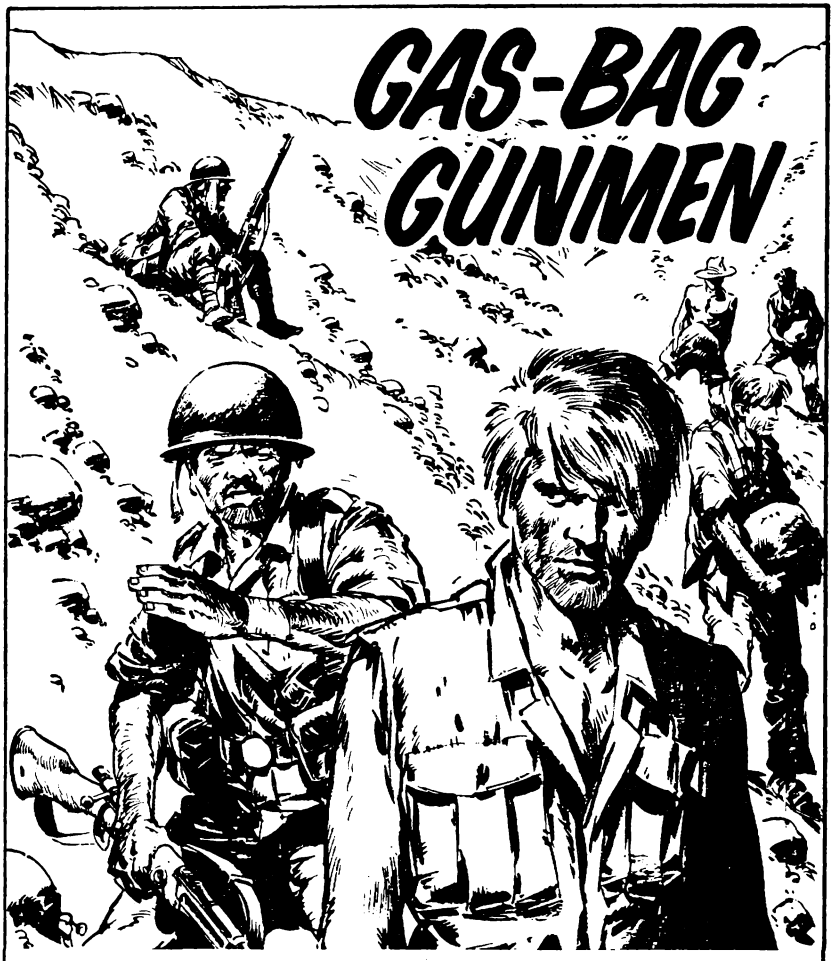
GAS-BAG GUNMEN

Stars of Soccer — Mark Fulton



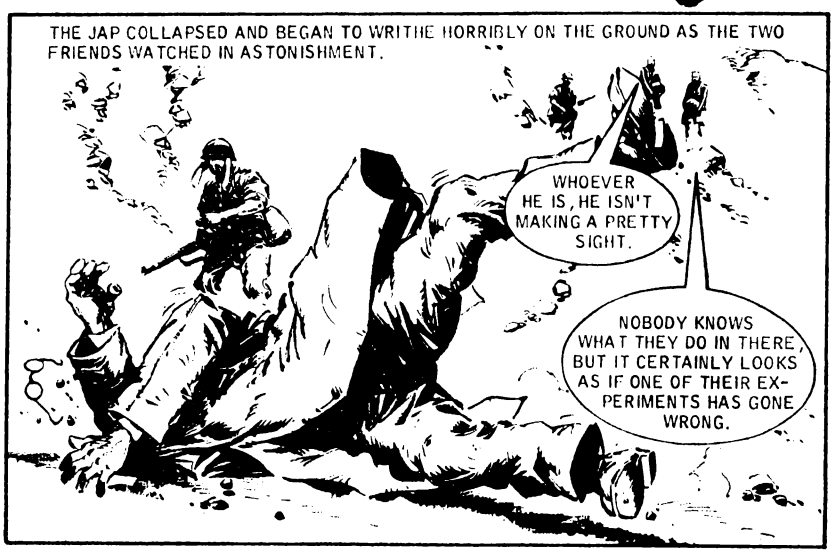
LIEUTENANT TOM BREWSTER, R.N., A SUBMARINE NAVIGATOR CAPTURED BY THE JAPS AND IMPRISONED ON A REMOTE PACIFIC ISLAND, NEVER STOPPED PLANNING AN ESCAPE ATTEMPT, IMPOSSIBLE THOUGH IT SEEMED. BUT THERE WERE TIMES WHEN THE JAP BRUTALITY AND STARVATION ALMOST BROKE HIS SPIRIT.

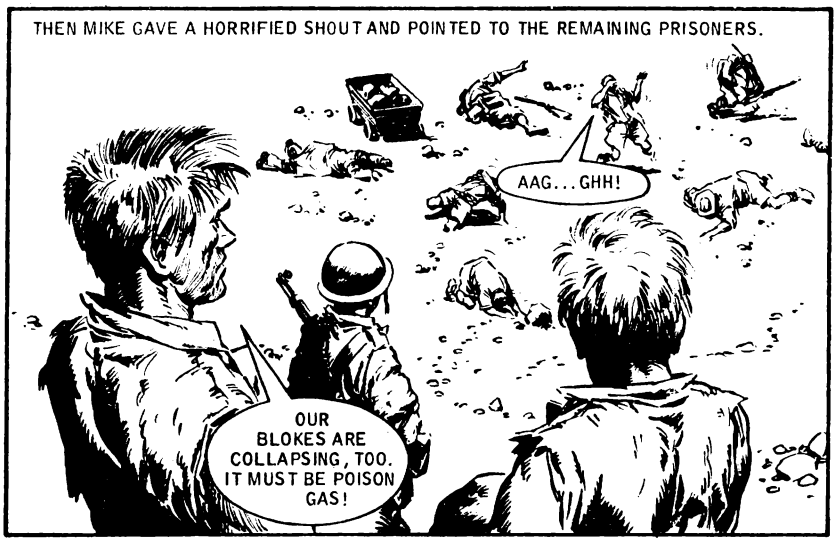
First published 1974

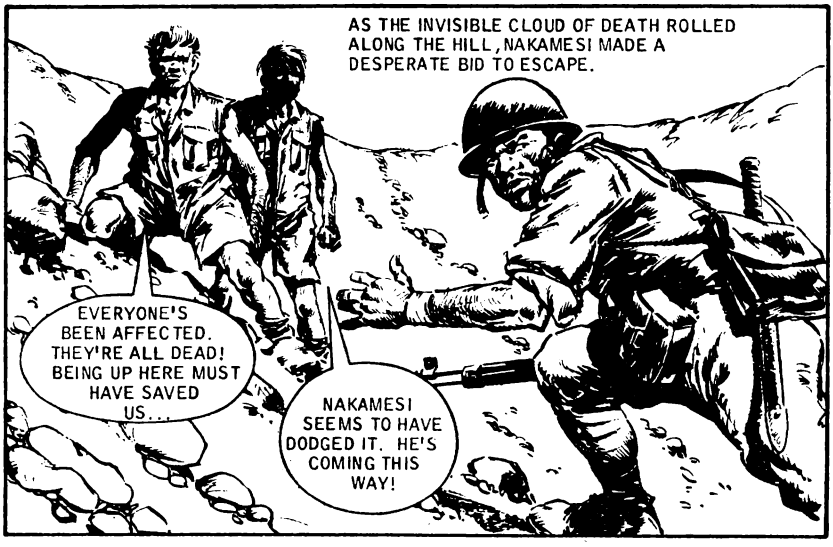
FORTUNATELY TOM HAD GOOD FRIENDS AMONG THE OTHER PRISONERS. ONE OF THESE WAS MIKE TRAVIS, A FELLOW NAVAL OFFICER.
ARE YOU OK, TOM? IF NAKAMESI THINKS YOU'RE SKIVING HE'LL COME BACK AND GIVE YOU A BEATING.
I'M ALL RIGHT, MIKE. HE JUST CAUGHT ME WATCHING ONE OF THE BALLOONS.
TOM WAS INTRIGUED BY THE SMALL BALLOONS THE JAPS SENT OFF AT INTERVALS FROM THE ISLAND.
THEY'RE PROBABLY WEATHER BALLOONS. BUT IF WE COULD TIE A COUPLE TOGETHER, WE MIGHT ESCAPE...
AND CROSS A THOUSAND MILES OF PACIFIC? YOU'RE CRAZY, CHUM!

BUT THEIR CONVERSATION WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE RETURN OF THE BRUTAL GUARD, NAKAMESI.
SPEEDO, SPEEDO, OR YOU NO GO BACK TO NIPPON WHEN WORK FINISH NEXT WEEK.
HUH, HE'LL MISS US WHEN WE LEAVE, HE WON'T HAVE ANYONE TO KICK AROUND!
THEIR DEFIANT CHEERFULNESS INFURIATED THEIR LITTLE JAP MASTER, WHO BEGAN TO SCREAM WITH RAGE.
RUN UP HILL AND DOWN AGAIN OR YOU GET BEATING!
BETTER DO AS HE SAYS, MIKE. IF WE PUSH HIM TOO FAR HE'LL USE HIS GUN.

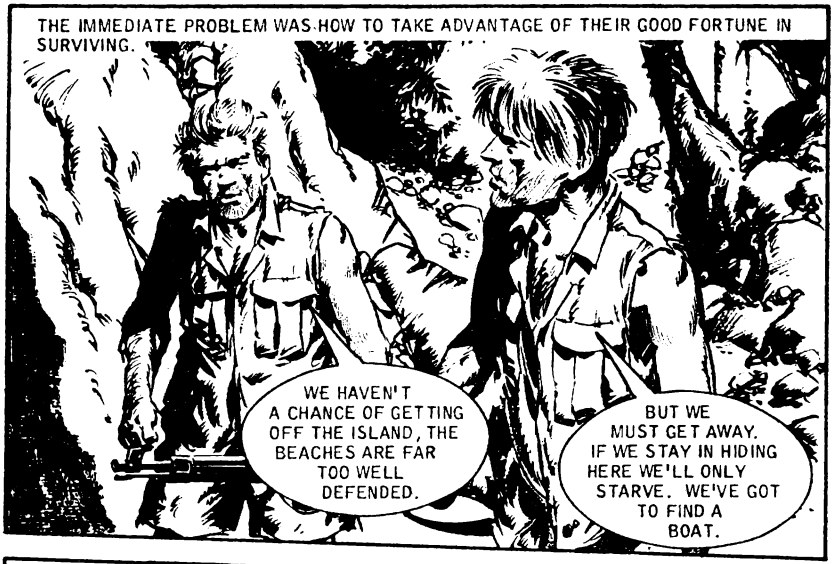
SUDDENLY ALL WORK STOPPED AND ALL EYES SWUNG ROUND TO A TERRIFIED JAP WHO EMERGED FROM THE SMALL BUILDING ON THE HILL.
AAIIEE! AAIIEE!
WHAT'S HAPPENING? ISN'T HE ONE OF THE SCIENTISTS WHO WORK IN THAT PLACE?


THE JAP COLLAPSED AND BEGAN TO WRITHE HORRIBLY ON THE GROUND AS THE TWO FRIENDS WATCHED IN ASTONISHMENT.
WHOEVER HE IS, HE ISN'T MAKING A PRETTY SIGHT.
NOBODY KNOWS WHAT THEY DO IN THERE, BUT IT CERTAINLY LOOKS AS IF ONE OF THEIR EXPERIMENTS HAS GONE WRONG.


THEN MIKE GAVE A HORRIFIED SHOUT AND POINTED TO THE REMAINING PRISONERS.
AAG...GHH!
OUR BLOKES ARE COLLAPSING, TOO. IT MUST BE POISON GAS!


AS THE INVISIBLE CLOUD OF DEATH ROLLED ALONG THE HILL, NAKAMESI MADE A DESPERATE BID TO ESCAPE.
EVERYONE'S BEEN AFFECTED. THEY'RE ALL DEAD! BEING UP HERE MUST HAVE SAVED US...
NAKAMESI SEEMS TO HAVE DODGED IT. HE'S COMING THIS WAY!

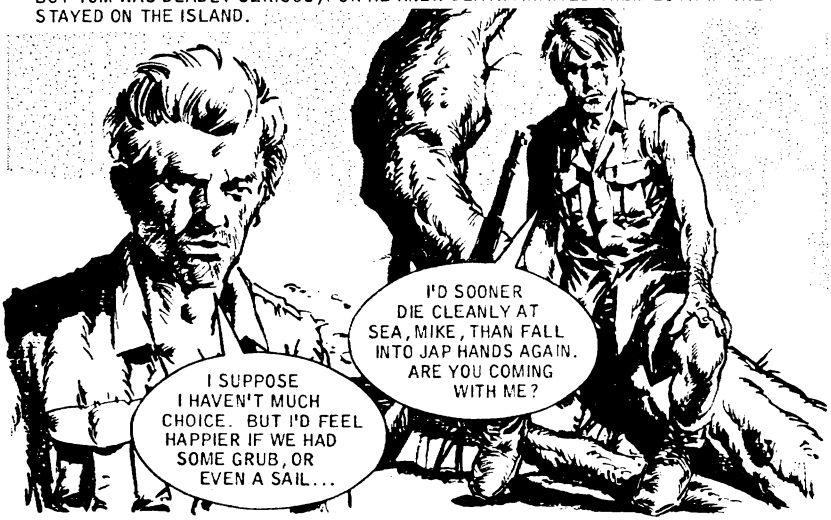
THE SIGHT OF THE EVIL LITTLE GUARD WAS TOO MUCH FOR TOM.


THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM WAS HOW TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR GOOD FORTUNE IN SURVIVING.
WE HAVEN'T A CHANCE OF GETTING OFF THE ISLAND, THE BEACHES ARE FAR TOO WELL DEFENDED.
BUT WE MUST GET AWAY. IF WE STAY IN HIDING HERE WE'LL ONLY STARVE. WE'VE GOT TO FIND A BOAT.

AS DARKNESS FELL THEY APPROACHED THE ISLAND SHORE, WHERE THE JAPANESE WERE STILL TAKING PRECAUTIONS.
WE'RE IN LUCK. WITH THOSE GAS-MASK EYE-PIECES STEAMED UP THEY WOULDN'T SEE US IF WE WALKED RIGHT PAST THEM!

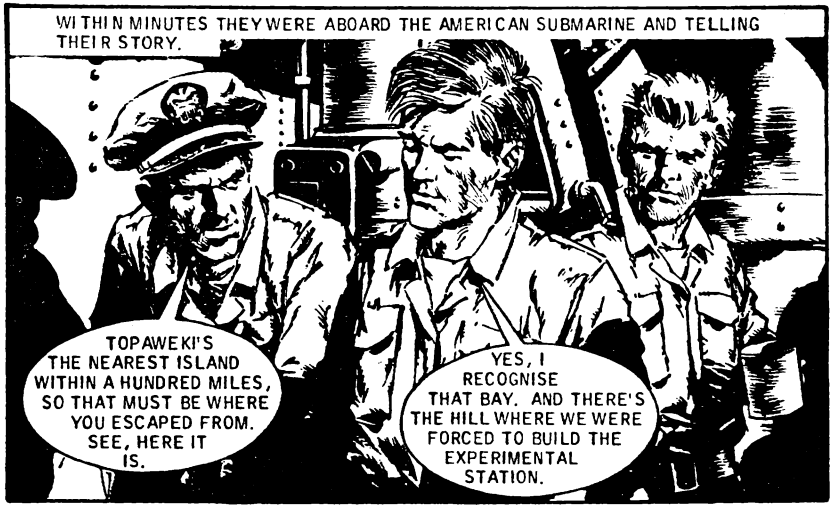
FURTHER ALONG THE BEACH WAS A FISHING RAFT USED BY THE JAPANESE TROOPS FOR LAZING IN THE SUN.

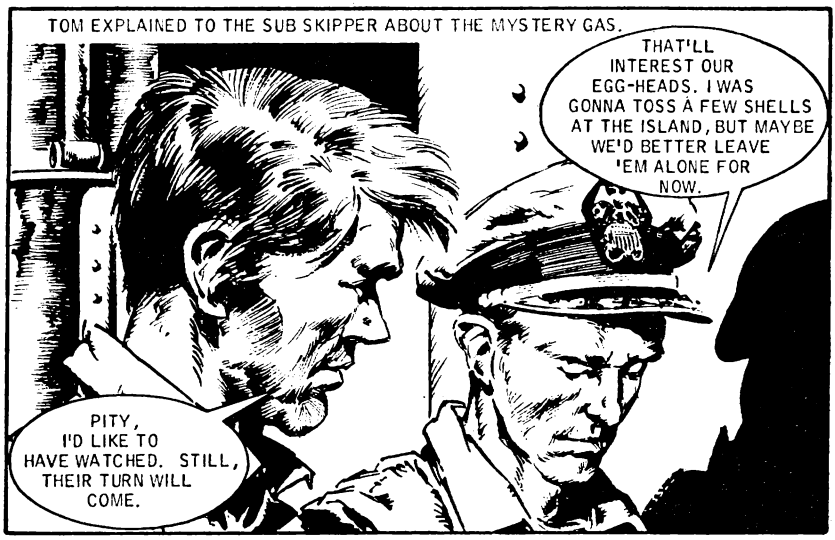
BUT TOM WAS DEADLY SERIOUS, FOR HE KNEW DEATH AWAITED THEM BOTH IF THEY STAYED ON THE ISLAND.

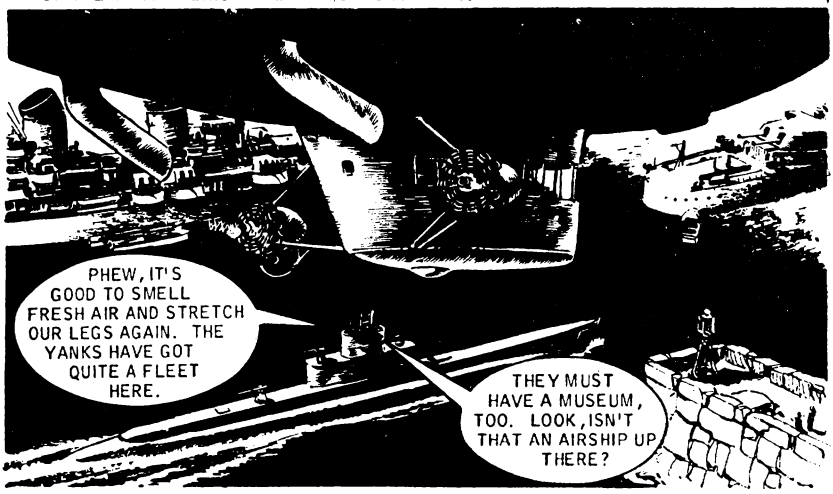


THEY SWAM OUT TO THE RAFT, CAST OFF, AND WERE TAKEN WELL OUT TO SEA BY THE TIDE.
WELL, WE'RE ON OUR WAY. BUT IT'LL BE A LONG, THIRSTY JOURNEY.
I DON'T CARE. I'VE A FEELING OUR LUCK HAS CHANGED, PROVIDING WE CAN HOLD OUT.
BUT THE PACIFIC IS A HUGE OCEAN, AND THE RAFT WAS A DRIFTING SPECK ON ITS VAST SURFACE.
TWENTY FOUR HOURS WITHOUT A DRINK BY THE TIME IT GETS DARK. WHAT DO YOU THINK OF OUR CHANCES NOW?
I NEVER DID THINK THEY WERE VERY BRIGHT, MATE. BUT I'D STILL RATHER BE HERE THAN ON THE ISLAND...
BUT BY THE FOLLOWING MORNING THEY WERE ALMOST FINISHED. THEN, AS TOM SCANNED THE HORIZON HOPELESSLY–
LOOK, A PERISCOPE!

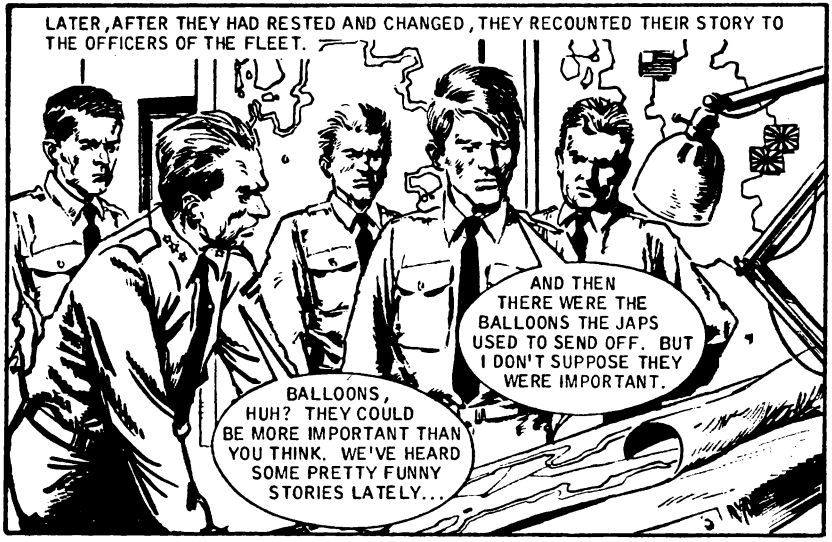
HARDLY ABLE TO BELIEVE IT WAS REAL, THEY WATCHED THE SUBMARINE SURFACE LESS THAN A HUNDRED YARDS AWAY.
MAYBE IT'S A JAP!
NO, IT'S A YANK. WE'RE SAVED, MIKE, EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT!

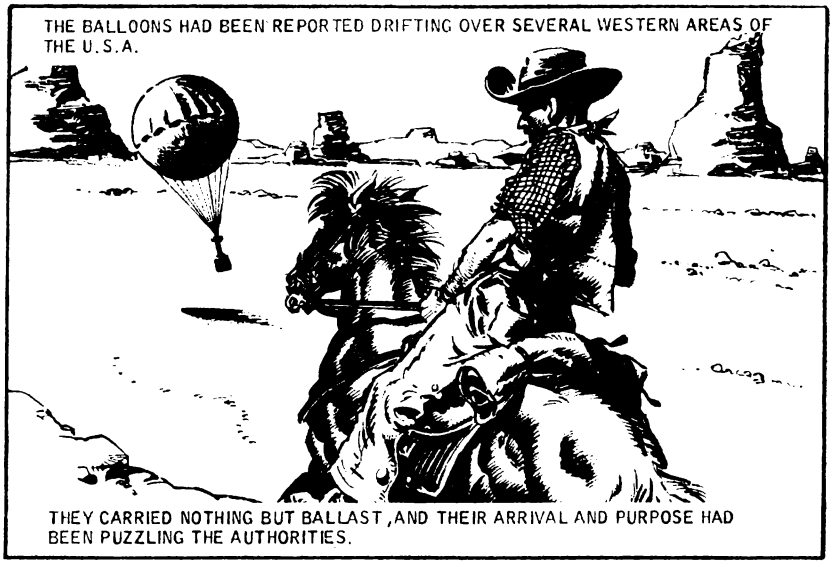

WITHIN MINUTES THEY WERE ABOARD THE AMERICAN SUBMARINE AND TELLING THEIR STORY.
TOPAWEKI'S THE NEAREST ISLAND WITHIN A HUNDRED MILES, SO THAT MUST BE WHERE YOU ESCAPED FROM. SEE, HERE IT IS.
YES, I RECOGNISE THAT BAY. AND THERE'S THE HILL WHERE WE WERE FORCED TO BUILD THE EXPERIMENTAL STATION.

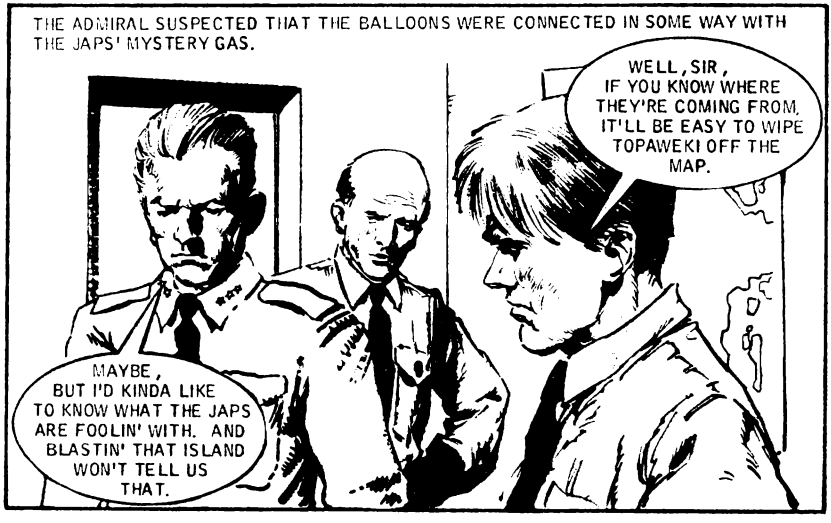

TOM EXPLAINED TO THE SUB SKIPPER ABOUT THE MYSTERY GAS.
THAT'LL INTEREST OUR EGG-HEADS. I WAS GONNA TOSS A FEW SHELLS AT THE ISLAND, BUT MAYBE WE'D BETTER LEAVE 'EM ALONE FOR NOW.
PITY, I'D LIKE TO HAVE WATCHED. STILL, THEIR TURN WILL COME.

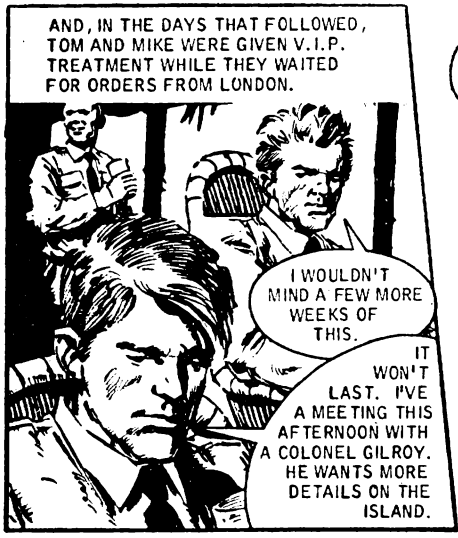

THE SUBMARINE HAD COMPLETED A PATROL AND WAS RETURNING TO ITS BASE ON ONE OF THE MANY AMERICAN-HELD PACIFIC ISLANDS.
PHEW, IT'S GOOD TO SMELL FRESH AIR AND STRETCH OUR LEGS AGAIN. THE YANKS HAVE GOT QUITE A FLEET HERE.
THEY MUST HAVE A MUSEUM, TOO. LOOK, ISN'T THAT AN AIRSHIP UP THERE?

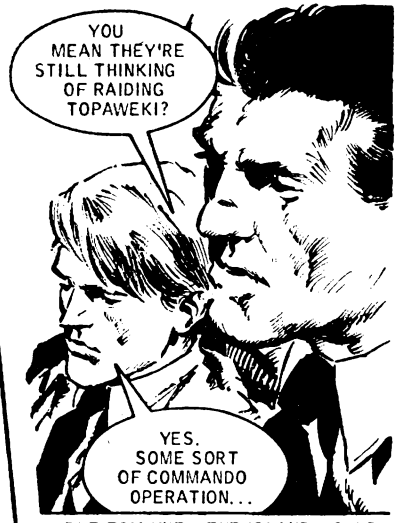
TOM GRINNED, RECOGNISING THE HELIUM-FILLED CRAFT AS A PATROL BLIMP USED BY THE U. S. NAVY.
THEY USE THEM FOR ANTI-SUBMARINE WORK ON SUPPLY CONVOY RUNS. I SAW SOME WHEN I VISITED NEW YORK LAST YEAR.
I'M GLAD YOU TOLD ME. I THOUGHT MAYBE THEY HADN'T ANY REAL AIR-CRAFT LEFT AFTER PEARL HARBOUR!


LATER, AFTER THEY HAD RESTED AND CHANGED, THEY RECOUNTED THEIR STORY TO THE OFFICERS OF THE FLEET.
AND THEN THERE WERE THE BALLOONS THE JAPS USED TO SEND OFF. BUT I DON'T SUPPOSE THEY WERE IMPORTANT.
BALLOONS, HUH? THEY COULD BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOU THINK. WE'VE HEARD SOME PRETTY FUNNY STORIES LATELY...

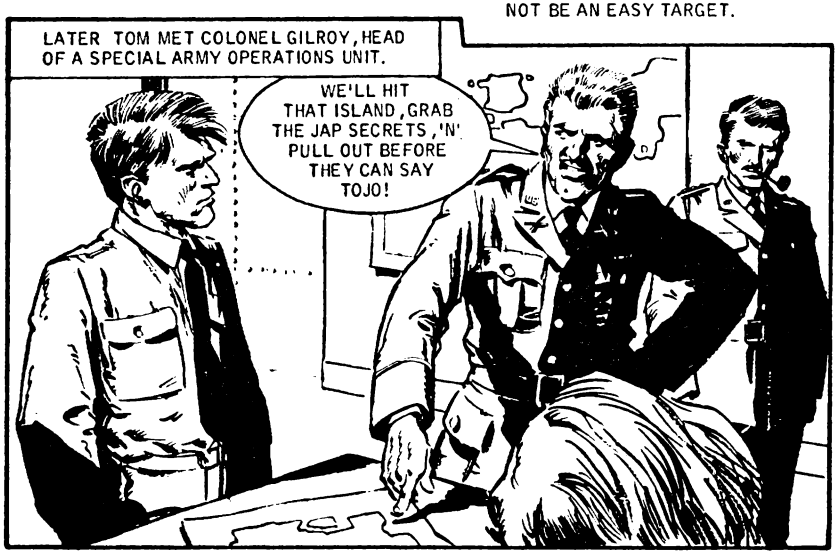

THE BALLOONS HAD BEEN REPORTED DRIFTING OVER SEVERAL WESTERN AREAS OF THE U.S.A.
THEY CARRIED NOTHING BUT BALLAST, AND THEIR ARRIVAL AND PURPOSE HAD BEEN PUZZLING THE AUTHORITIES.

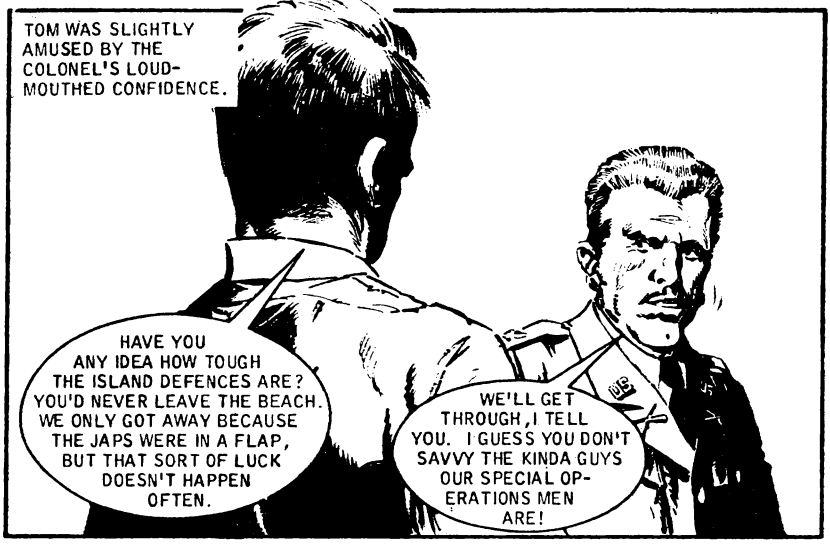

THE ADMIRAL SUSPECTED THAT THE BALLOONS WERE CONNECTED IN SOME WAY WITH THE JAPS' MYSTERY GAS.
WELL, SIR, IF YOU KNOW WHERE THEY'RE COMING FROM, IT'LL BE EASY TO WIPE TOPAWEKI OFF THE MAP.
MAYBE, BUT I'D KINDA LIKE TO KNOW WHAT THE JAPS ARE FOOLIN' WITH. AND BLASTIN' THAT ISLAND WON'T TELL US THAT.

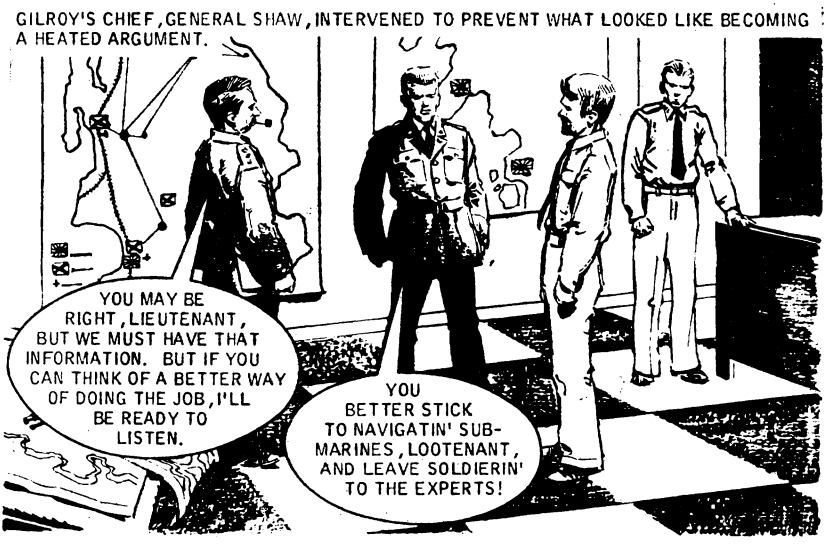




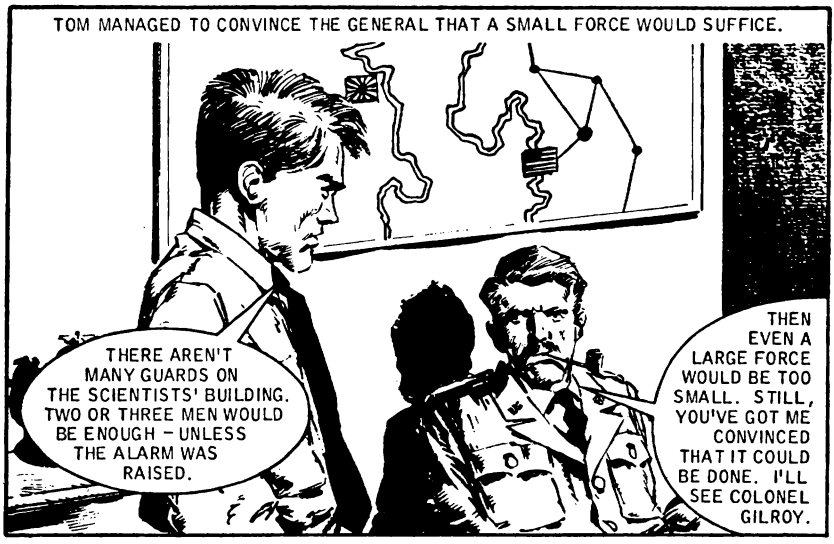
BUT TOM KNEW THE ISLAND WOULD NOT BE AN EASY TARGET.

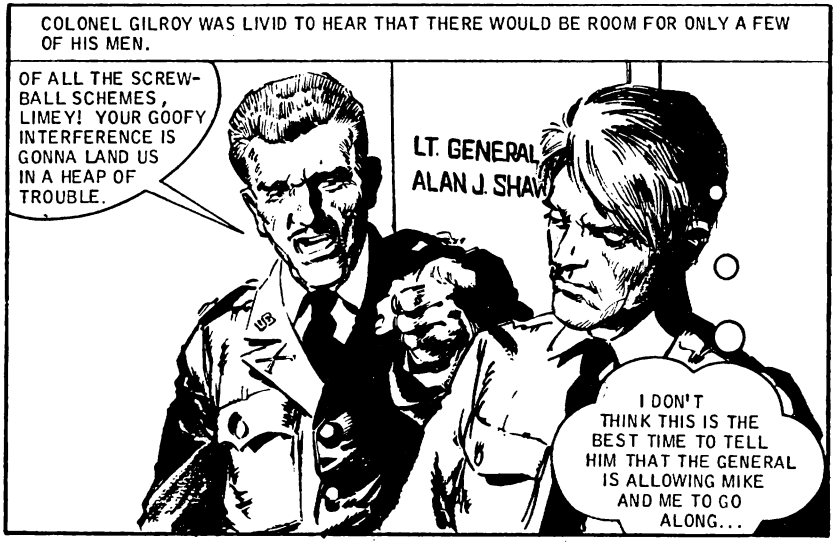



TOM WAS SLIGHTLY AMUSED BY THE COLONEL'S LOUD-MOUTHED CONFIDENCE.
HAVE YOU ANY IDEA HOW TOUGH THE ISLAND DEFENCES ARE? YOU'D NEVER LEAVE THE BEACH. WE ONLY GOT AWAY BECAUSE THE JAPS WERE IN A FLAP, BUT THAT SORT OF LUCK DOESN'T HAPPEN OFTEN.
WE'LL GET THROUGH, I TELL YOU. I GUESS YOU DON'T SAVVY THE KINDA GUYS OUR SPECIAL OP-ERATIONS MEN ARE!

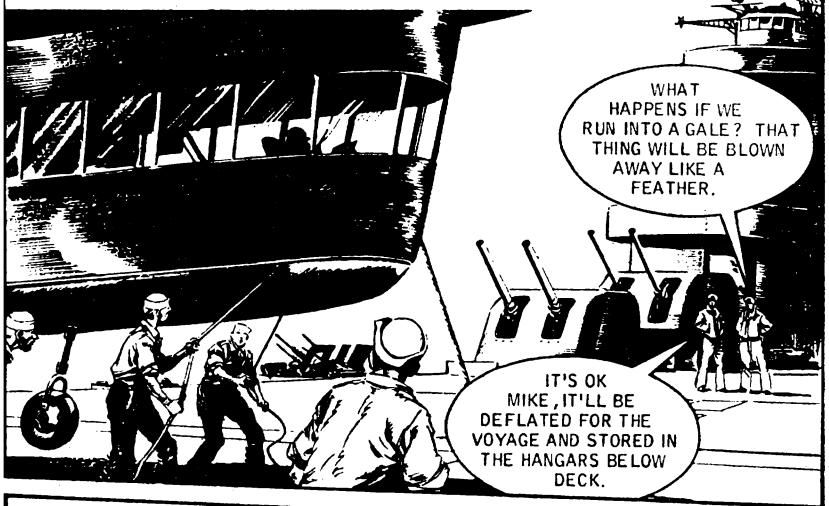

GILROY'S CHIEF, GENERAL SHAW, INTERVENED TO PREVENT WHAT LOOKED LIKE BECOMING A HEATED ARGUMENT.
YOU MAY BE RIGHT, LIEUTENANT, BUT WE MUST HAVE THAT INFORMATION. BUT IF YOU CAN THINK OF A BETTER WAY OF DOING THE JOB, I'LL BE READY TO LISTEN.
YOU BETTER STICK TO NAVIGATIN' SUB-MARINES, LOOTENANT, AND LEAVE SOLDIERIN' TO THE EXPERTS!

BUT DURING THE NEXT FEW DAYS, AS PLANNING WENT AHEAD, TOM GAVE A LOT OF THOUGHT TO THE OPERATION.
YOU KNOW, FLYING THOSE BLIMPS MUST BE LIKE DRIFTING ON A CLOUD. NO WONDER THE NAVY BLOKES LIKE THEM...
MIKE, YOU'VE GOT IT! IF THE YANKS USED A BLIMP, THEY COULD SNEAK IN AND OUT AGAIN WITHOUT BEING DISCOVERED.
AS TOM EXPECTED, THERE WERE SNAGS. BUT GENERAL SHAW ADMITTED THE IDEA HAD ITS POSSIBILITIES.
THERE ARE SEVERAL PLACES WHERE A BLIMP COULD LAND UNSEEN, SIR. AND I'D BE WILLING TO GO AS A GUIDE...
I THOUGHT YOU WERE ANGLING FOR THAT. BUT THERE ARE SOME TOUGH PROBLEMS TO BE LICKED FIRST. WE'D NEED SEVERAL BLIMPS TO CARRY AN ASSAULT GROUP.

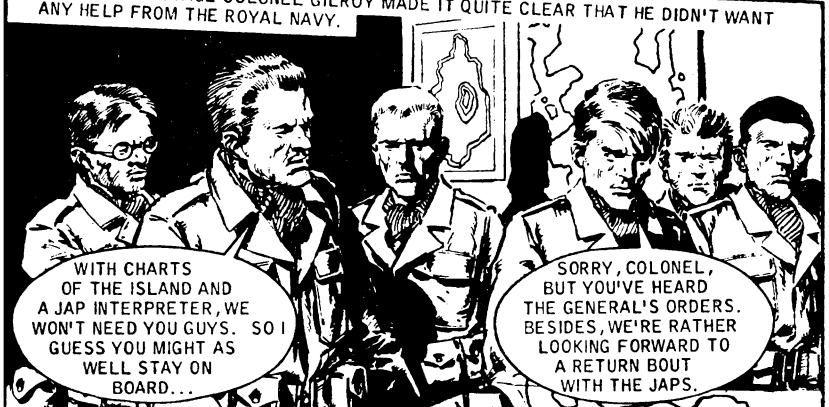

TOM MANAGED TO CONVINCE THE GENERAL THAT A SMALL FORCE WOULD SUFFICE.
THERE AREN'T MANY GUARDS ON THE SCIENTISTS' BUILDING. TWO OR THREE MEN WOULD BE ENOUGH – UNLESS THE ALARM WAS RAISED.
THEN EVEN A LARGE FORCE WOULD BE TOO SMALL. STILL, YOU'VE GOT ME CONVINCED THAT IT COULD BE DONE. I'LL SEE COLONEL GILROY.


COLONEL GILROY WAS LIVID TO HEAR THAT THERE WOULD BE ROOM FOR ONLY A FEW OF HIS MEN.
OF ALL THE SCREW-BALL SCHEMES, LIMEY! YOUR GOOFY INTERFERENCE IS GONNA LAND US IN A HEAP OF TROUBLE.
LT. GENERAL ALAN J. SHAW
I DON'T THINK THIS IS THE BEST TIME TO TELL HIM THAT THE GENERAL IS ALLOWING MIKE AND ME TO GO ALONG...

TO GIVE THE JAPS NO HINT OF WHAT WAS PLANNED, THE BLIMP WAS TO BE TRANSPORTED ON AN AIRCRAFT CARRIER. TWO DAYS LATER THE TINY STRIKING FORCE SET OUT, CONSISTING OF TIM, MIKE, GILROY, A SERGEANT, A PRIVATE AND A SECOND-GENERATION AMERICAN OF JAPANESE DESCENT WHO WOULD ACT AS INTERPRETER.

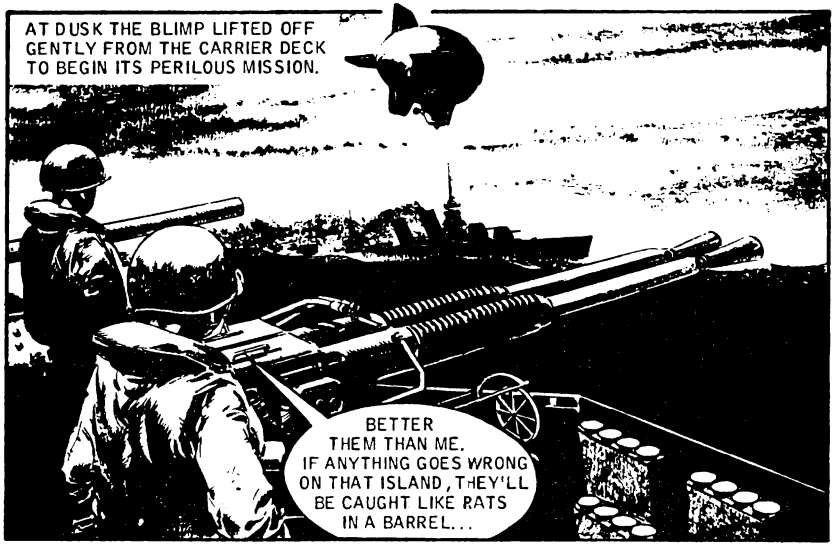


DURING THE VOYAGE COLONEL GILROY MADE IT QUITE CLEAR THAT HE DIDN'T WANT ANY HELP FROM THE ROYAL NAVY.



THE PLAN ALSO CALLED FOR A FORCE OF AMERICAN BOMBERS TO BLAST THE ISLAND ONCE THE RAIDERS WERE CLEAR.

SOME DAYS LATER, AT A SAFE RANGE FROM THE ISLAND, THE BLIMP WAS INFLATED ON THE CARRIER FLIGHT-DECK.
NOW REMEMBER, YOU GUYS, I'M BOSSIN' THIS OPERATION, AND WE GOTTA MAKE IT GOOD. WE'RE HITTIN' THE GLORY TRAIL!
HERE COMES GILROY. ANY MINUTE NOW HE'LL START TO SING "THE STARS AND STRIPES FOR EVER".


AT DUSK THE BLIMP LIFTED OFF GENTLY FROM THE CARRIER DECK TO BEGIN ITS PERILOUS MISSION.
BETTER THEM THAN ME. IF ANYTHING GOES WRONG ON THAT ISLAND, THEY'LL BE CAUGHT LIKE RATS IN A BARREL...

CRUISING AT SIXTY KNOTS, THE BLIMP HEADED FOR TOPAWEKI. IT WAS SEVERAL HOURS LATER BEFORE THE JAP-HELD ISLAND CAME INTO VIEW...
HEY, AIN'T THAT TOPAWEKI? WE'RE GONNA MISS IT!
COOL OFF, COLONEL, I AIM TO CIRCLE UP-WIND, THEN WE CAN DRIFT BACK WITHOUT USIN' OUR MOTORS. THAT WAY THERE'S NO NOISE.
THE MANOEUVRE NEEDED SKILLED NAVIGATION, BUT THE BLIMP SKIPPER WAS AN EXPERT.
AS THEY DRIFTED ACROSS THE BEACH, TOM WATCHED OUT FOR THE LANDING SITE HE HAD SUGGESTED.
THERE IT IS, THAT STRETCH OF HILLSIDE OVER THERE. IT'S AN EASY WALK FROM THERE TO THE LABORATORY.
OK, WE'LL GIVE IT A WHIRL. I HOPE THE JAPS DON'T HAVE GUARDS WANDERIN' AROUND...

SINKING GENTLY, THE BLIMP SETTLED ON ITS LANDING WHEEL AND TRUNDLED ACROSS THE HILLSIDE.
WE'RE DOWN! LET GO FORE AND AFT GRAPNELS!
SPECIAL EQUIPMENT HAD BEEN FITTED TO REPLACE A GROUND-HANDLING CREW, AND IT WORKED PERFECTLY.
THEY WORK – WE'VE GRABBED DIRT AND WE'RE SLOWIN' DOWN!
SCRAMBLING OUT, THE PASSENGERS QUICKLY HELPED TO SECURE THE BUOYANT SHIP.
THAT'S FINE. THE HOOK CAN'T DRAG NOW, EVEN IF IT BLOWS A TORNADO!
JUST AS WELL. IT WOULD BE A LONG SWIM BACK TO THE CARRIER IF THE BLIMP BROKE LOOSE.

COLONEL GILROY WAITED IMPATIENTLY AS THEY WORKED, CONSTANTLY CHECKING HIS WATCH.
SHAKE IT UP, YOU GUYS. IN A COUPLE OF HOURS THE SUPERFORTS ARE GONNA BLAST THIS ISLAND, AND I DON'T AIM TO BE HERE THEN.
THE COLONEL'S GETTING RESTLESS. MAYBE HE DOESN'T FEEL SO CONFIDENT NOW WE'VE ACTUALLY ARRIVED.
TOM LED THE WAY, FOR HE KNEW THE ISLAND WELL AFTER HIS LONG MONTHS OF IMPRISONMENT.
THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE SHAKES, TOM, ESPECIALLY WITH THAT LOUD-MOUTH IN CHARGE.
HE'LL BE OK, MIKE, HE JUST WANTS TO SHOW HOW TOUGH HE IS... SHHH, I HEARD SOMEONE AHEAD!

CROUCHING IN THE SHADOWS, THEY WATCHED A FILE OF MEN APPROACHING.

COLONEL GILROY SCOWLED, FOR HE SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THAT HIMSELF.
SO LONG AS THEY DON'T GET A CHANCE TO SHOOT. ONE BURST OF FIRING NOW COULD RUIN EVERY-THING.
I MEANT WE'D HIDE UP AND AMBUSH 'EM. WE CAN EASILY HANDLE FOUR LITTLE GUYS.
TOM WAS UNCOMFORTABLY AWARE OF GILROY'S INDECISION – HE WAS NOT THE TOUGH LEADER HE LIKED TO APPEAR.
THEN YOU'D BETTER BE READY TO KILL A FEW MORE, COLONEL, BECAUSE THEY'LL BE HERE IN A MOMENT.
I DON'T NEED TEACHIN' MY JOB, SAILOR. I WAS KILLIN' JAPS WHEN YOU WERE IN NAVAL SCHOOL.
GILROY EYED DAGGERS AT TOM, BUT THERE WAS NO TIME TO ARGUE. QUICKLY THEY TOOK UP THEIR POSITIONS...

THE UNSUSPECTING JAPS WANDERED SLOWLY ACROSS THE HILLSIDE, UNAWARE OF THE DANGER AWAITING THEM.
GET 'EM!
BY THE SACRED MOUNTAIN!

THE SURPRISED JAPS STOOD NO CHANCE AS THEIR DETERMINED OPPONENTS ATTACKED WITH GUN BUTTS AND FISTS.
UNGHH!
HOLD THAT, YOU YELLOW MONKEY!

IT WAS ALL OVER IN A MATTER OF SECONDS AND NOT A SHOT WAS FIRED.
TIE 'EM BEFORE THEY RECOVER, AND LET'S GET MOVING. SHAKE IT UP, YOU GUYS...

BUT UNSEEN BY THE OTHERS, ONE HARD-HEADED JAP WAS FAR FROM FINISHED.
SUDDENLY TOM SAW THE DANGER AND YELLED A WARNING.
LOOK OUT!
WHAT THE HECK?

WITHOUT HESITATION TOM HURLED HIMSELF FORWARD AS THE COLONEL INSTINCTIVELY RAISED HIS TOMMY GUN.
DON'T SHOOT, YOU IDIOT!
TOM'S SWINGING FISTS HAMMERED THE DESPERATE JAP INTO SUBMISSION.
THIS SHOULD KEEP YOU QUIET.
UNGHHH!

STARTLED BY HIS NARROW ESCAPE, GILROY TRIED TO BLUSTER HIS WAY OUT OF LOOKING FOOLISH.

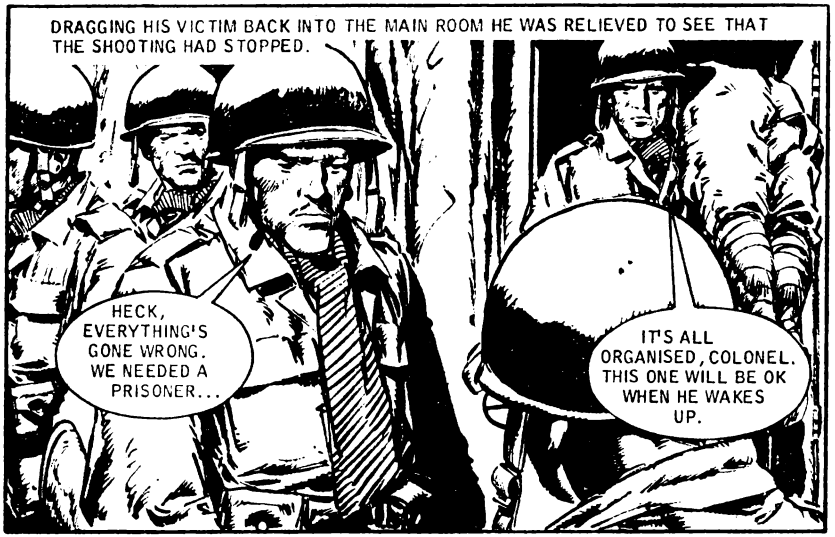
THAT WAS A FOOL THING TO DO, LOOTENANT, I MIGHT HAVE DRILLED YOU IF MY REACTIONS HADN'T BEEN SLICK.

RUBBISH, YOU ALMOST GAVE US ALL AWAY! I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE EXPERT AT KILLING JAPS, COLONEL?

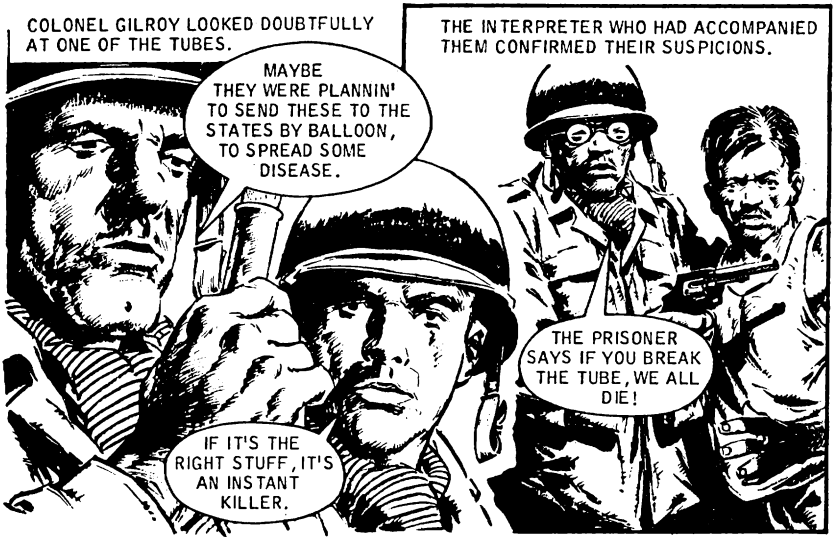
THE COLONEL MUTTERED UNDER HIS BREATH BUT GAVE NO AUDIBLE REPLY.

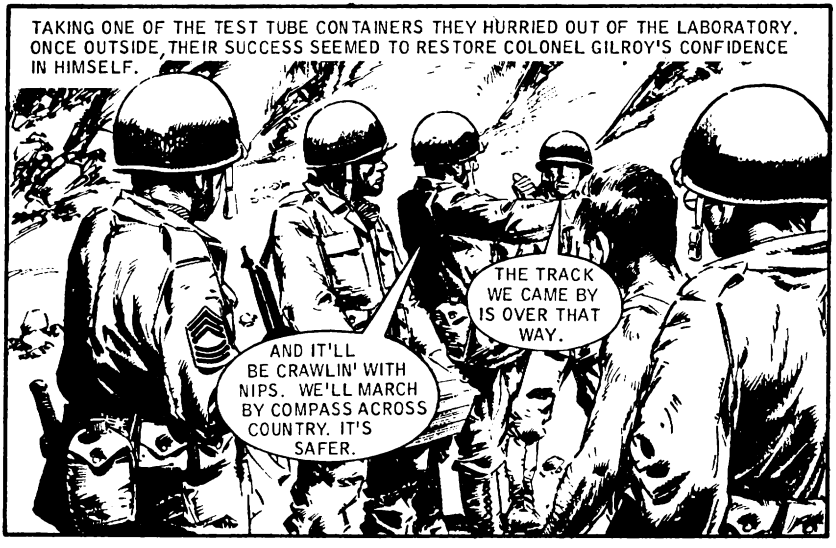
AFTER A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF THE BUILDINGS TOM SIGNALLED THE OTHERS TO JOIN HIM.
THERE ARE JAPS ASLEEP INSIDE. WE'LL HAVE TO MOVE IN QUICKLY.
THAT'S NO PROBLEM, I GOT A SHOULDER THAT'LL OPEN ANY DOOR. AND DON'T FORGET WE WANT AT LEAST ONE PRISONER...
UNFORTUNATELY THE DOOR WAS STRONGER THAN COLONEL GILROY HAD ANTICIPATED. BUT AT HIS THIRD ATTEMPT TO BREAK IT OPEN...
INTRUDERS!
GOLDARN IT, THAT'S GIVEN 'EM TIME TO WAKE UP...

THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE WAS LOST, AND BULLETS BEGAN TO FLY WILDLY, SOME KILLING THE YANK SERGEANT.
AAAH!
WATCH OUT, THERE COULD BE MORE NEXT DOOR!
DASHING INTO THE CORRIDOR TOM SAW A DOOR MOVE AND RIPPED IT OPEN.
UNGHH!
YOU'LL DO AS OUR PRISONER, MATE!


DRAGGING HIS VICTIM BACK INTO THE MAIN ROOM HE WAS RELIEVED TO SEE THAT THE SHOOTING HAD STOPPED.
HECK, EVERYTHING'S GONE WRONG. WE NEEDED A PRISONER...
IT'S ALL ORGANISED, COLONEL. THIS ONE WILL BE OK WHEN HE WAKES UP.

WORKING SWIFTLY THEY BROKE INTO THE LABORATORY ITSELF, KNOWING THAT THE TWO JAPS WHO HAD BEEN SEEN TO ESCAPE WOULD SOON RETURN WITH REINFORCEMENTS.
I DON'T SEE ANY GAS CYLINDERS. MAYBE YOU WERE MISTAKEN ABOUT WHAT THEY WERE DOING HERE.
IT COULD BE GERM WARFARE THEY'RE WORKING ON. LOOK AT THESE TEST TUBES PACKED IN CONTAINERS.


COLONEL GILROY LOOKED DOUBTFULLY AT ONE OF THE TUBES.
MAYBE THEY WERE PLANNIN' TO SEND THESE TO THE STATES BY BALLOON, TO SPREAD SOME DISEASE.
IF IT'S THE RIGHT STUFF, IT'S AN INSTANT KILLER.
THE INTERPRETER WHO HAD ACCOMPANIED THEM CONFIRMED THEIR SUSPICIONS.
THE PRISONER SAYS IF YOU BREAK THE TUBE, WE ALL DIE!


TAKING ONE OF THE TEST TUBE CONTAINERS THEY HURRIED OUT OF THE LABORATORY. ONCE OUTSIDE, THEIR SUCCESS SEEMED TO RESTORE COLONEL GILROY'S CONFIDENCE IN HIMSELF.
AND IT'LL BE CRAWLIN' WITH NIPS. WE'LL MARCH BY COMPASS ACROSS COUNTRY. IT'S SAFER.
THE TRACK WE CAME BY IS OVER THAT WAY.

BUT ALREADY JAPANESE PATROLS, ALERTED BY THE TWO GUARDS WHO HAD ESCAPED, WERE SPREADING ACROSS COUNTRY.
AN ATTACK HAS BEEN MADE ON THE LABORATORIES! PARACHUTISTS MUST HAVE DROPPED, SO SPREAD OUT AND SEARCH FOR THEM! NONE MUST ESCAPE.

IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE ONE OF THE PATROLS ENCOUNTERED THE FUGITIVES.
LOOK, THEY ARE OVER THERE!
THE NIPS HAVE SPOTTED US!

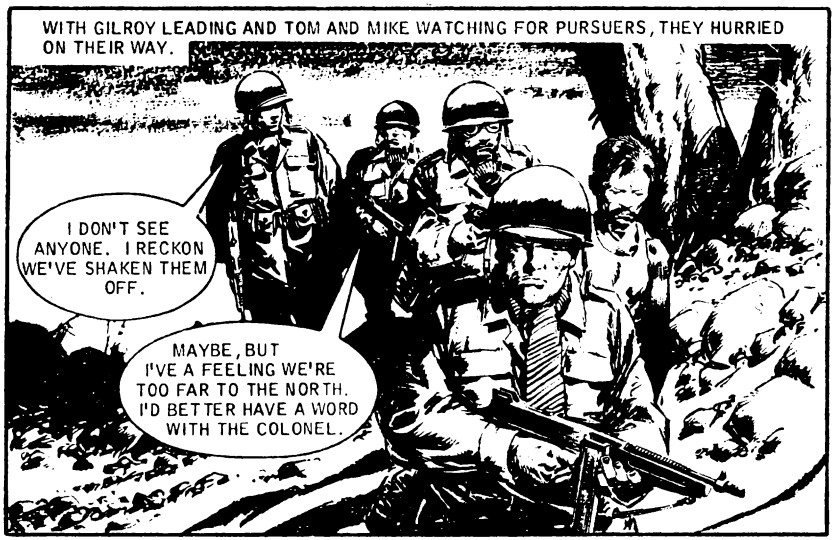
GILROY KNEW THE GAME WAS UP – IF THEY RAN FOR THE BLIMP THE JAPS WOULD FOLLOW AND COULD EASILY DESTROY IT.
LOOKS LIKE WE GOTTA STAND AND FIGHT.
AND QUICKLY, BEFORE TOO MANY OF THEIR PALS JOIN IN THE SCRAP...

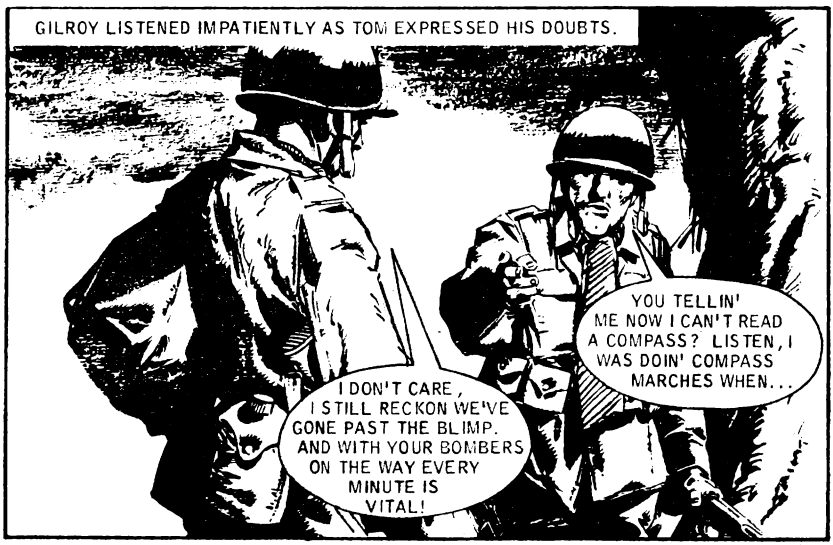
THE JAPANESE ADVANCED CONFIDENTLY, KNOWING REINFORCEMENTS WERE CLOSE AT HAND.
BANZAI!
MAKE EVERY SHOT COUNT!

EXPECTING THEIR OPONENTS TO WITHDRAW, THE JAPANESE WERE STARTLED TO FIND THEM HOLDING THEIR GROUND.
AAHH!
KEEP TOGETHER. IF THEY SPLIT US UP IN THE DARK WE'RE FINISHED.

IT WAS A BITTER SCRAP, WITH NO QUARTER GIVEN.
THAT'S FOR ALL MY MATES WHO WERE KILLED HERE!
AAAH!

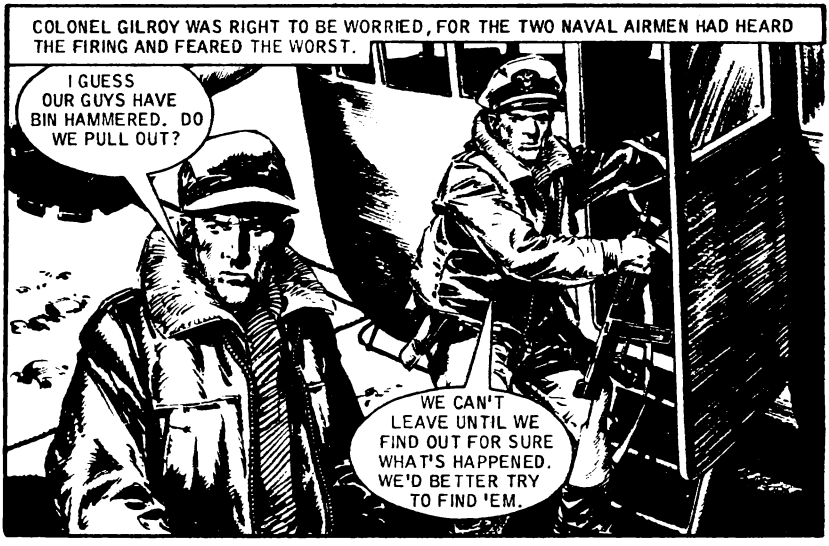
SUDDENLY THE ATTACKERS WITHDREW, LEAVING SEVERAL DEAD AND WOUNDED.
THEY'RE CHICKEN – THEY'RE RUNNIN' OUT!
THEY DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE BLIMP, SO I SUPPOSE THEY'RE GOING TO WAIT FOR REINFORCEMENTS. LET'S GET OUT OF HERE WHILE WE CAN.


WITH GILROY LEADING AND TOM AND MIKE WATCHING FOR PURSUERS, THEY HURRIED ON THEIR WAY.
I DON'T SEE ANYONE. I RECKON WE'VE SHAKEN THEM OFF.
MAYBE, BUT I'VE A FEELING WE'RE TOO FAR TO THE NORTH. I'D BETTER HAVE A WORD WITH THE COLONEL.


GILROY LISTENED IMPATIENTLY AS TOM EXPRESSED HIS DOUBTS.
YOU TELLIN' ME NOW I CAN'T READ A COMPASS? LISTEN, I WAS DOIN' COMPASS MARCHES WHEN...
I DON'T CARE, I STILL RECKON WE'VE GONE PAST THE BLIMP. AND WITH YOUR BOMBERS ON THE WAY EVERY MINUTE IS VITAL!

THE COLONEL JUST WOULD NOT LISTEN TO ADVICE, SO THEY HURRIED ON ACROSS THE ISLAND. THEN...
THE SEA! I GUESS THE COMPASS MUSTA GOT DAMAGED IN THE SCRAP...
NOW YOU'RE CONVINCED.

FORTUNATELY TOM RECOGNISED THE SECTION OF BEACH AND HE LED THEM IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.
THE BLIMP CREW WILL BE THINKING WE'VE BIN WIPED OUT.
WE HAVEN'T FAR TO GO NOW. WE SHOULD SEE THE BLIMP ONCE WE GET PAST THIS HIGH GROUND.


COLONEL GILROY WAS RIGHT TO BE WORRIED, FOR THE TWO NAVAL AIRMEN HAD HEARD THE FIRING AND FEARED THE WORST.
I GUESS OUR GUYS HAVE BIN HAMMERED. DO WE PULL OUT?
WE CAN'T LEAVE UNTIL WE FIND OUT FOR SURE WHAT'S HAPPENED. WE'D BETTER TRY TO FIND 'EM.

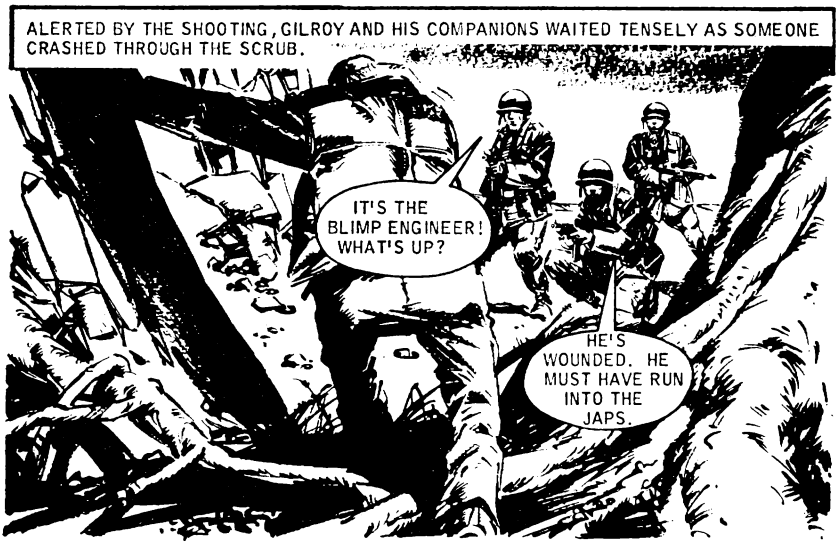
THEY SET OFF WARILY, HOPING TO ENCOUNTER THEIR COMPANIONS.
THIS IS CRAZY, SKIPPER. WE SHOULD BE LIFTIN' OFF, NOT PROWLIN' AROUND LIKE COMBAT TROOPS.
WE'LL JUST GO TO THE TOP OF THE HILL, AND IF WE DON'T SEE ANYONE WE'LL PULL OUT. THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME LEFT...

BUT THERE WAS LESS TIME THAN HE THOUGHT, FOR A JAPANESE PATROL WAS IN THE VICINITY.
HALT, OR YOU DIE!
RUN FOR IT, THAT'S A NIP!

THE BLIMP COMMANDER WAS NO COWARD, YET HE KNEW HIS RESISTANCE WAS HOPELESS.
AAHH!
COME ON, YOU LITTLE YELLOW MONKEYS!

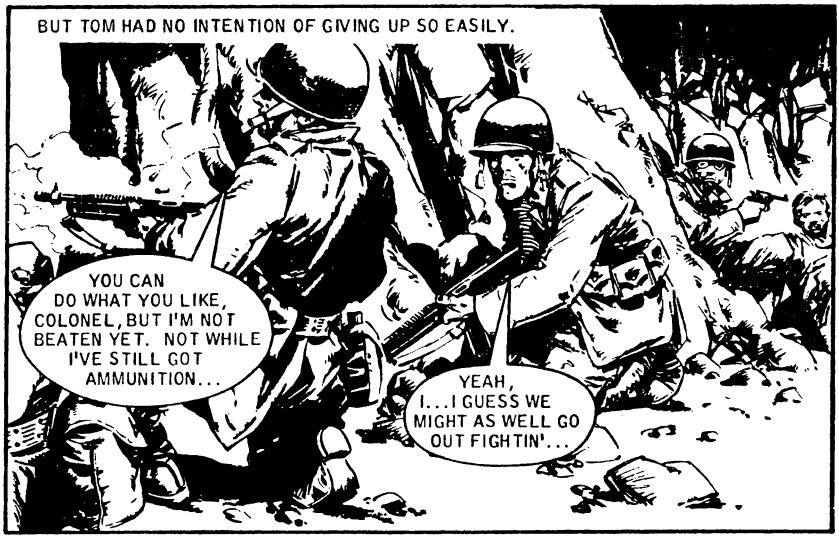
IT WAS A GALLANT BUT HOPELESS GESTURE – HE WAS GREATLY OUTNUMBERED AND THE JAPS WERE EXPERIENCED FIGHTERS.
SAVE YOURSELF, CLANCEY, DON'T WAIT FOR ME... AAAGHH!
GET THE OTHER ONE!

THE FLEEING AMERICAN MADE A DIFFICULT TARGET, BUT AS HE ALMOST REACHED COVER...
AAHH!
AFTER HIM, QUICKLY!


ALERTED BY THE SHOOTING, GILROY AND HIS COMPANIONS WAITED TENSELY AS SOMEONE CRASHED THROUGH THE SCRUB.
IT'S THE BLIMP ENGINEER! WHAT'S UP?
HE'S WOUNDED. HE MUST HAVE RUN INTO THE JAPS.

BUT THERE WAS NOTHING THEY COULD DO FOR THE UNFORTUNATE ENGINEER.

LIFE DRAINED OUT OF THE BLIMP CREWMAN AND HE BREATHED HIS LAST. GILROY LOOKED SHATTERED AS HE REALISED THEIR HOPELESS SITUATION.


BUT TOM HAD NO INTENTION OF GIVING UP SO EASILY.
YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU LIKE, COLONEL, BUT I'M NOT BEATEN YET. NOT WHILE I'VE STILL GOT AMMUNITION...
YEAH, I...I GUESS WE MIGHT AS WELL GO OUT FIGHTIN'...

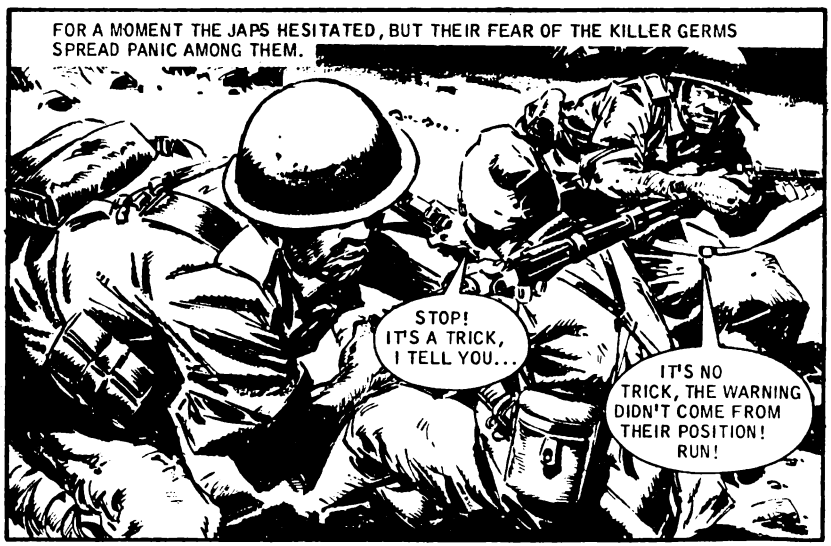
THE DOGGED COURAGE OF THE TWO 'LIMEYS' HAD GIVEN THE LOUD-MOUTH COLONEL FRESH HEART.
BANZAI!
THERE'S STILL A CHANCE, IF ONLY WE CAN GET PAST THEM AND BACK TO THE BLIMP...

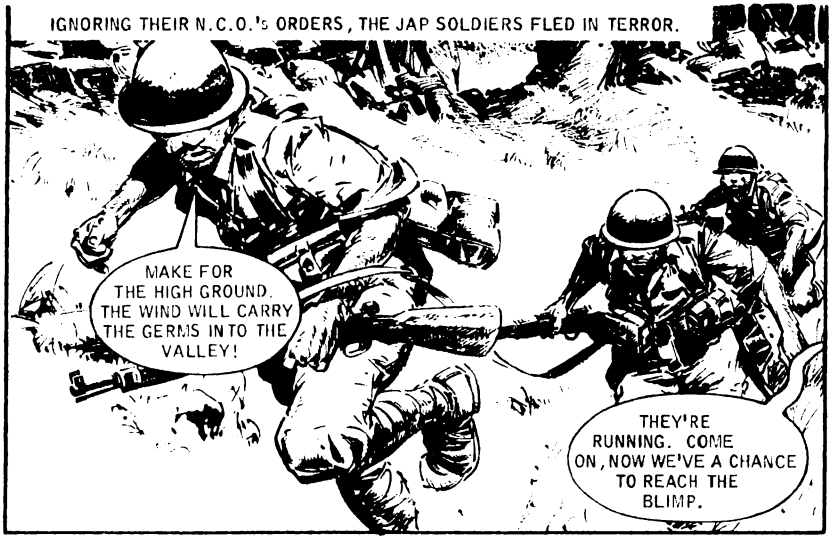
BUT GETTING PAST THEIR ATTACKERS WOULD BE NO EASY MATTER.
SPREAD OUT AND PIN THEM DOWN. WHEN REINFORCEMENTS COME, WE WILL WIPE THEM OUT.

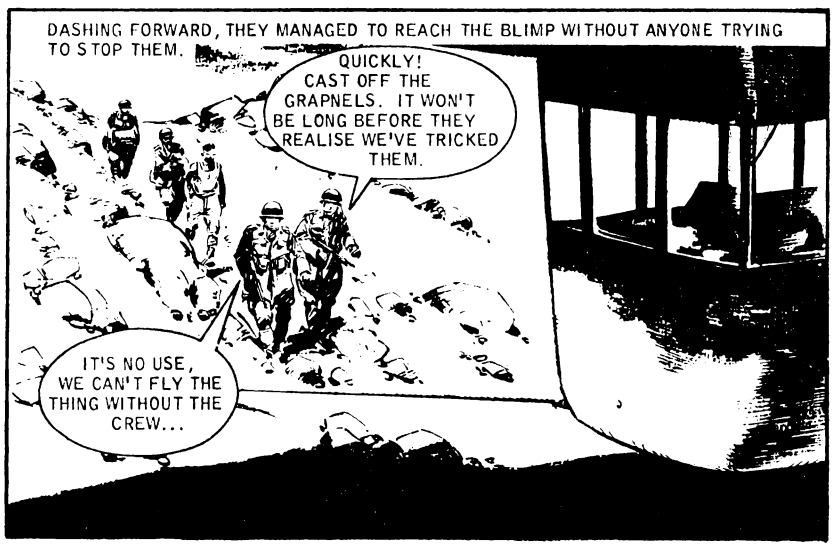
AS THE JAPS BEGAN SNIPING, TOM RACKED HIS BRAINS FOR A WAY OUT.
THEY'RE GONNA SIT AND WAIT UNTIL WE RUN OUT OF AMMO.
AND IF THEY SEE THE BLIMP THEY'LL CUT OFF OUR ONLY MEANS OF ESCAPE.

SUDDENLY HE HAD AN IDEA. HE TURNED TO THE INTERPRETER.
SHOUT TO THEM IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGE, TELL THEM A BULLET HAS SMASHED SOME OF THE TUBES OF BACTERIA.
PERHAPS THEY WILL BELIEVE ME. BUT ONLY IF THEY THINK I AM ONE OF THEIR OWN MEN...

CRAWLING INTO THE UNDERGROWTH, THE INTERPRETER SHOUTED HIS WARNING IN JAPANESE.
SAVE YOURSELVES! THEY HAVE RELEASED THE CREEPING DEATH... AAAHHH!
IT IS A TRICK! ONE OF THE EUROPEANS MUST KNOW OUR LANGUAGE.


FOR A MOMENT THE JAPS HESITATED, BUT THEIR FEAR OF THE KILLER GERMS SPREAD PANIC AMONG THEM.
STOP! IT'S A TRICK, I TELL YOU...
IT'S NO TRICK, THE WARNING DIDN'T COME FROM THEIR POSITION! RUN!


IGNORING THEIR N.C.O.'s ORDERS, THE JAP SOLDIERS FLED IN TERROR.
MAKE FOR THE HIGH GROUND. THE WIND WILL CARRY THE GERMS INTO THE VALLEY!
THEY'RE RUNNING. COME ON, NOW WE'VE A CHANCE TO REACH THE BLIMP.

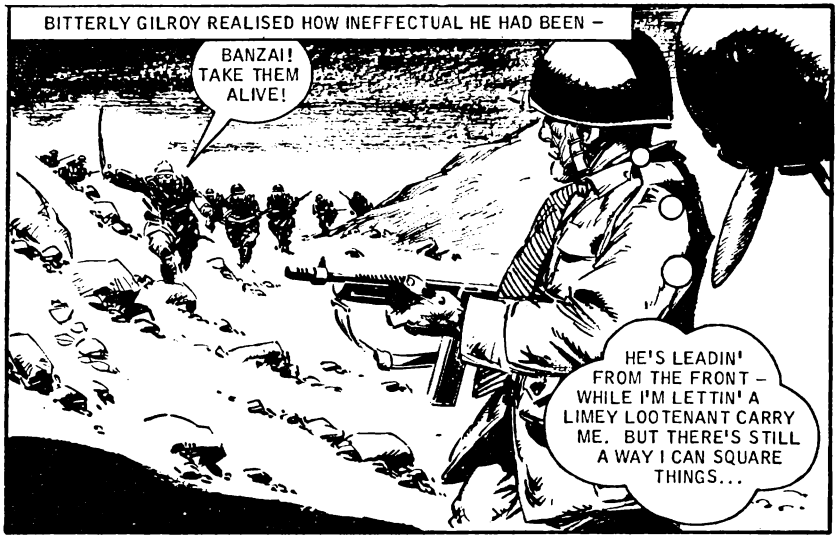

DASHING FORWARD, THEY MANAGED TO REACH THE BLIMP WITHOUT ANYONE TRYING TO STOP THEM.
QUICKLY! CAST OFF THE GRAPNELS. IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE THEY REALISE WE'VE TRICKED THEM.
IT'S NO USE, WE CAN'T FLY THE THING WITHOUT THE CREW...

TOM'S MOUTH TIGHTENED GRIMLY. HE HAD ESCAPED FROM THE ISLAND ONCE, AND HE INTENDED TO DO SO AGAIN.
LISTEN, THE BLIMP WILL FLOAT IF WE CAST OFF THE MOORINGS. WE'LL WORRY ABOUT FLYING IT WHEN WE'RE CLEAR OF THE ISLAND.
IT WON'T WORK, I TELL YOU. WE'RE FINISHED!

HE PUSHED GILROY ASIDE SCORNFULLY AND BEGAN TO RELEASE ONE OF THE GRAPNELS.
STAY WITH THE JAPS IF YOU WANT TO, COLONEL, BUT I'M GETTING OUT OF HERE EVEN IF I HAVE TO SWIM!
THEY'RE CRAZY. THE NIPS WILL BLAST US OUT OF THE SKY.

THE JAPANESE WERE QUICK TO REALISE THEY HAD BEEN TRICKED.
YOU FOOLS, NONE OF OUR MEN SHOUTED THAT WARNING. IT WAS A TRICK TO GET AWAY.
LOOK, OVER THERE! THEY HAVE AN AIRSHIP!

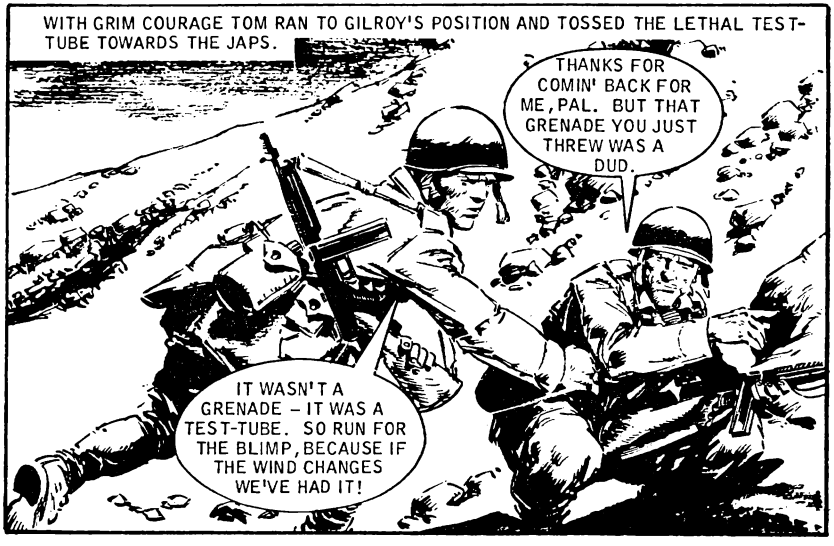
THE BLIMP WAS A MASSIVE AND EASY TARGET, AS GILROY WELL KNEW. WITH DISMAY HE SAW THE JAPS ADVANCE TOWARDS THEM.
HERE THEY COME! I TOLD YOU WE WOULDN'T MAKE IT!
EVERYONE ON BOARD, QUICKLY. WE'LL CAST OFF THE CABLES FROM INSIDE. WE SHAN'T NEED THE GRAPNELS AGAIN.


BITTERLY GILROY REALISED HOW INEFFECTUAL HE HAD BEEN –
BANZAI! TAKE THEM ALIVE!
HE'S LEADIN' FROM THE FRONT – WHILE I'M LETTIN' A LIMEY LOOTENANT CARRY ME. BUT THERE'S STILL A WAY I CAN SQUARE THINGS...

AS THE OTHERS SCRAMBLED INTO THE BLIMP GONDOLA GILROY TURNED SAVAGELY ON THE APPROACHING ENEMY.
AAAH!
I'M GONNA FIX YOU NIPS.

HIS DEFIANT GESTURE HALTED THE JAP RUSH, BUT ONLY FOR A MOMENT.
THAT'S STOPPED 'EM. BUT THEY CAN STILL SHOOT THAT GAS-BAG OUTA THE SKY...

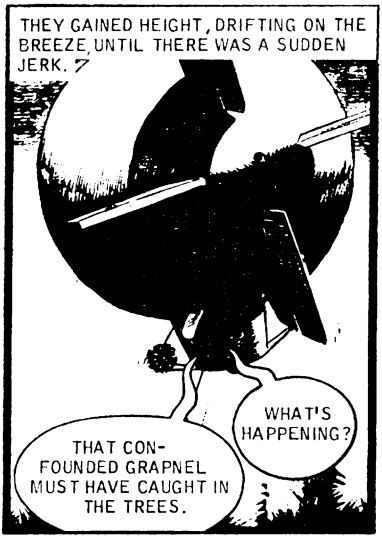
AS MORE JAPS APPEARED FROM THE UNDERGROWTH TOM DECIDED ON A DESPERATE REMEDY.
GILROY CAN'T GET BACK, HE'S PINNED DOWN. HAND ME ONE OF THOSE TEST-TUBES FROM THAT BOX WE BROUGHT FROM THE LABORATORY.
FOR PETE'S SAKE BE CAREFUL, TOM, THAT STUFF'S DEADLY!

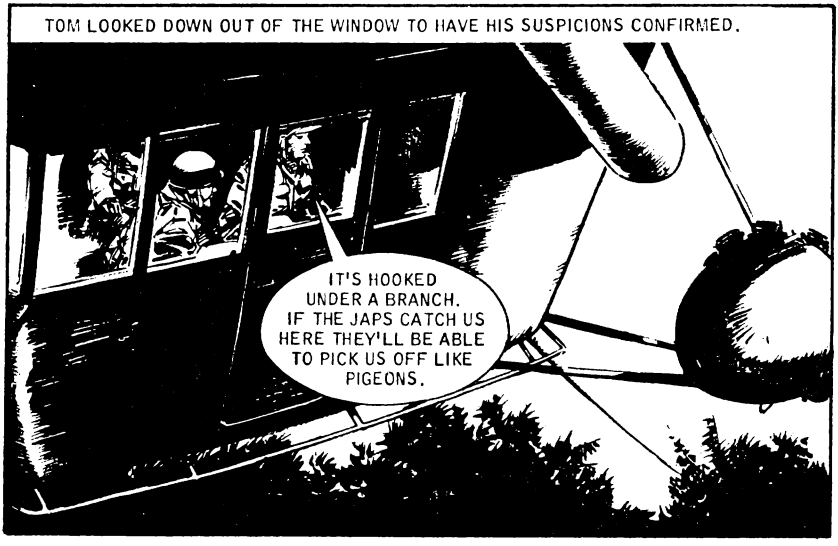

WITH GRIM COURAGE TOM RAN TO GILROY'S POSITION AND TOSSED THE LETHAL TEST-TUBE TOWARDS THE JAPS.
THANKS FOR COMIN' BACK FOR ME, PAL. BUT THAT GRENADE YOU JUST THREW WAS A DUD.
IT WASN'T A GRENADE – IT WAS A TEST-TUBE. SO RUN FOR THE BLIMP, BECAUSE IF THE WIND CHANGES WE'VE HAD IT!

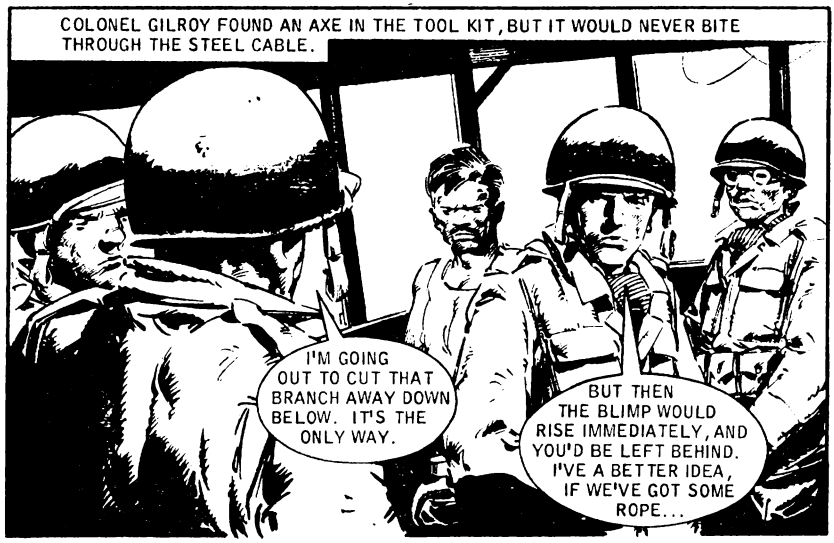
THE JAPS HAD INSTANT PROOF THAT THIS TIME IT WAS NO TRICK.
AAHHH!
THE GERMS - THEY'VE RELEASED THEM! RUN!

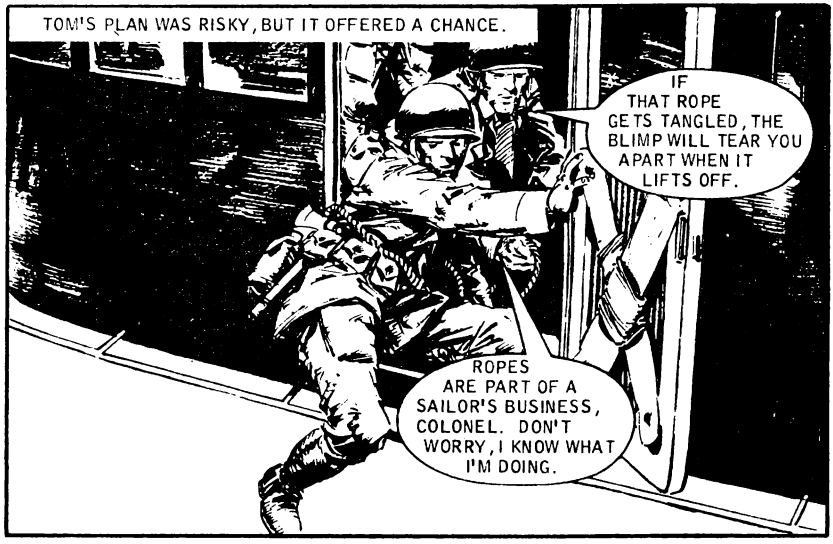
JUST IN TIME, TOM AND GILROY RETURNED TO THE BLIMP AND WERE HAULED ABOARD.
YOU NEARLY MISSED THE BUS, COLONEL. WE JUST JETTISONED THE GRAPNEL CABLES.
YOU GOT YOURSELF A PASSENGER, SAILOR. I GUESS IT AIN'T HEALTHY ON THE GROUND ANYMORE!

WITH THE GRAPNEL CABLES RELEASED, THE BLIMP ROSE SWIFTLY. BUT...
ONE OF THE CABLES HAS JAMMED. LET'S HOPE THE HOOK DOESN'T FOUL ANYTHING...


THEY GAINED HEIGHT, DRIFTING ON THE BREEZE, UNTIL THERE WAS A SUDDEN JERK.
WHAT'S HAPPENING?
THAT CONFOUNDED GRAPNEL MUST HAVE CAUGHT IN THE TREES.

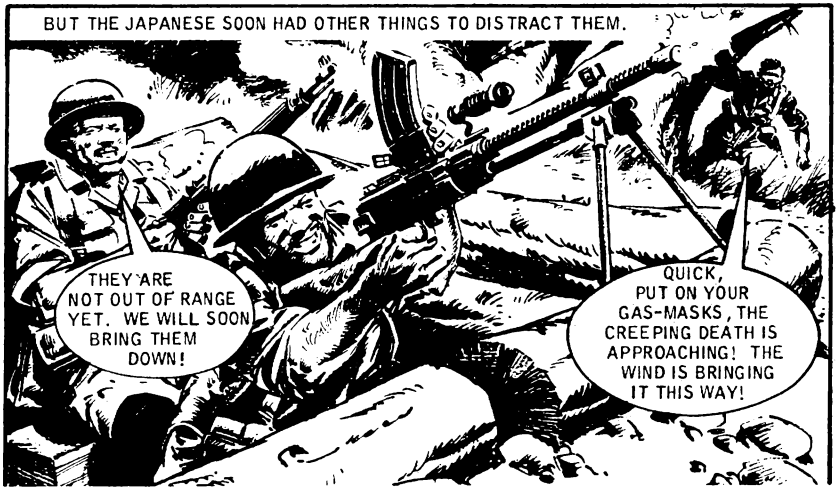

TOM LOOKED DOWN OUT OF THE WINDOW TO HAVE HIS SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED.
IT'S HOOKED UNDER A BRANCH. IF THE JAPS CATCH US HERE THEY'LL BE ABLE TO PICK US OFF LIKE PIGEONS.


COLONEL GILROY FOUND AN AXE IN THE TOOL KIT, BUT IT WOULD NEVER BITE THROUGH THE STEEL CABLE.
I'M GOING OUT TO CUT THAT BRANCH AWAY DOWN BELOW. IT'S THE ONLY WAY.
BUT THEN THE BLIMP WOULD RISE IMMEDIATELY, AND YOU'D BE LEFT BEHIND. I'VE A BETTER IDEA, IF WE'VE GOT SOME ROPE...


TOM'S PLAN WAS RISKY, BUT IT OFFERED A CHANCE.
IF THAT ROPE GETS TANGLED, THE BLIMP WILL TEAR YOU APART WHEN IT LIFTS OFF.
ROPES ARE PART OF A SAILOR'S BUSINESS, COLONEL. DON'T WORRY, I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING.

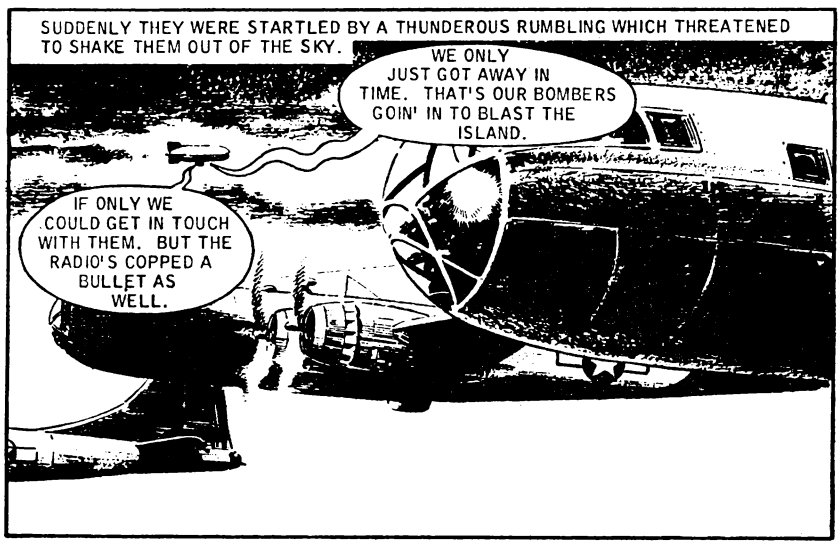
SLIDING DOWN THE CABLE TO WHERE THE GRAPNEL WAS JAMMED, TOM STARTED TO HACK AT THE OFFENDING BRANCH.
ALMOST THROUGH! GOT TO WATCH THAT ROPE, THOUGH. IF IT SNAGS I'LL BE STRETCHED LIKE AN ELASTIC BAND!
AS THE BRANCH GAVE WAY THE BLIMP LIFTED SWIFTLY, JERKING TOM HIGH INTO THE AIR.
PHEW, THAT WAS A NEAR THING!

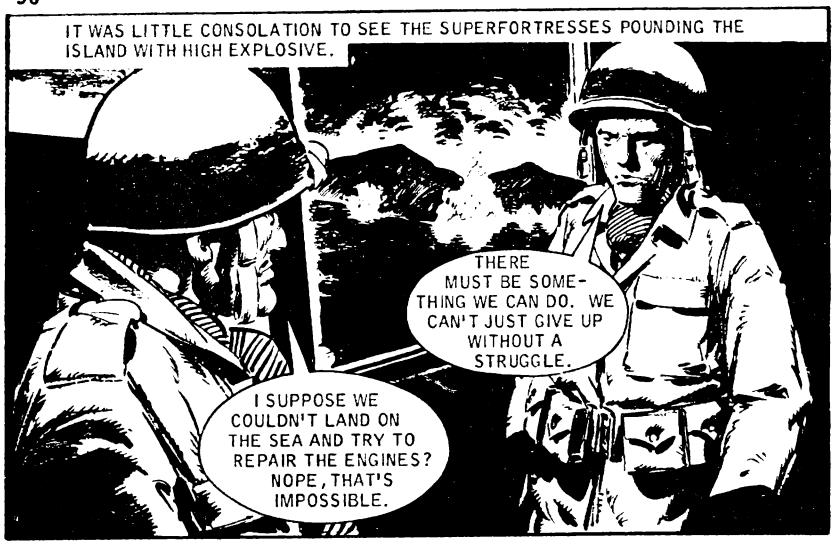
HE WAS HAULED ABOARD BY HIS COMPANIONS AS THE BEACH SLIPPED AWAY BENEATH THE GONDOLA.
I GUESS I'LL NEVER HEAR A WORD AGAINST LIMEYS AGAIN, LOOTENANT. WE ALL OWE YOU OUR LIVES!
WE'RE NOT OUT OF TROUBLE YET. SOME OF THE JAPS DOWN THERE HAVE SEEN US, AND THEY'RE FIRING.
WHEEL MANUAL

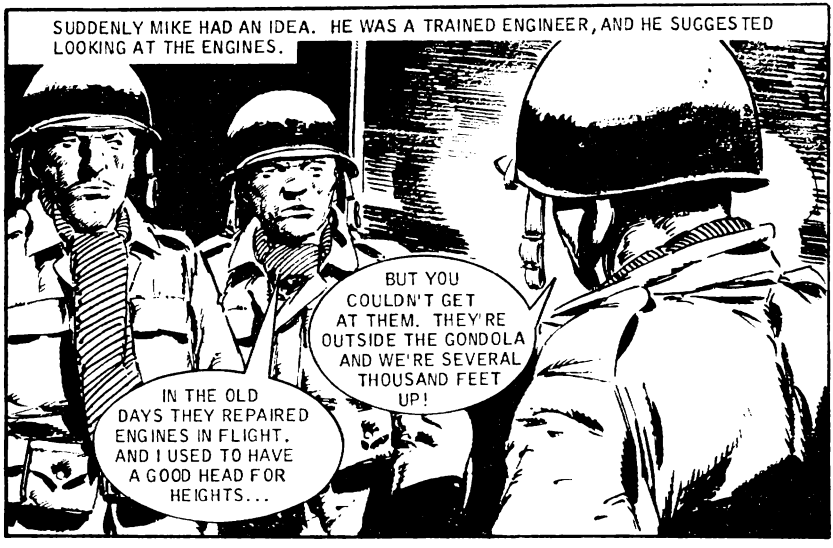

BUT THE JAPANESE SOON HAD OTHER THINGS TO DISTRACT THEM.
THEY ARE NOT OUT OF RANGE YET. WE WILL SOON BRING THEM DOWN!
QUICK, PUT ON YOUR GAS-MASKS, THE CREEPING DEATH IS APPROACHING! THE WIND IS BRINGING IT THIS WAY!

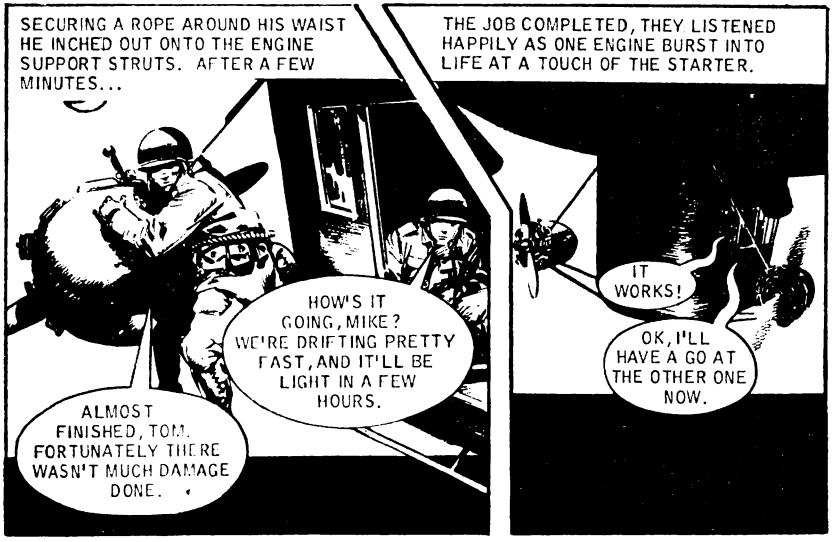
IN THE BLIMP THERE WAS A NEW PROBLEM.
IT'S NO GOOD. THE CONTROLS JUST DON'T SEEM TO WORK.
THAT FIRING AS WE CAME OVER THE BEACH COULD HAVE DAMAGED THE ENGINES.

WITHOUT POWER WE'RE AT THE MERCY OF THE WIND. WE'LL JUST KEEP DRIFTING UNTIL SOME JAP FIGHTER SEES US.

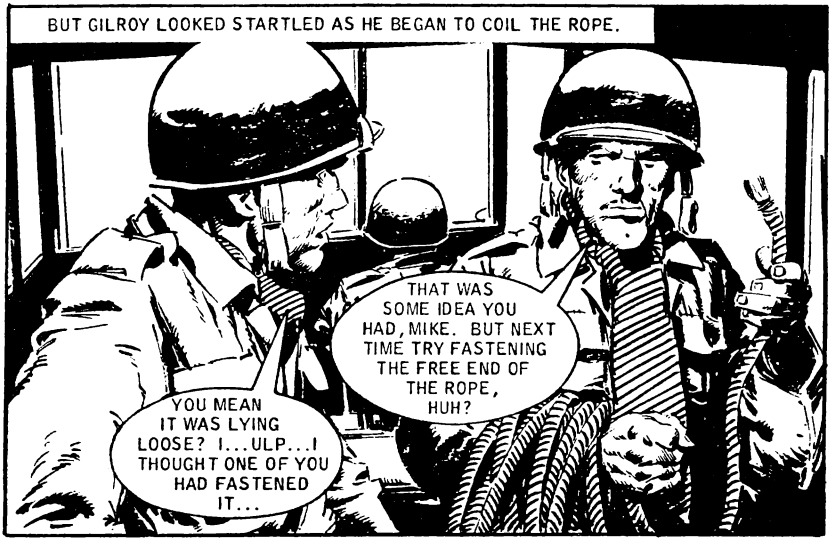

SUDDENLY THEY WERE STARTLED BY A THUNDEROUS RUMBLING WHICH THREATENED TO SHAKE THEM OUT OF THE SKY.
WE ONLY JUST GOT AWAY IN TIME. THAT'S OUR BOMBERS GOIN' IN TO BLAST THE ISLAND.
IF ONLY WE COULD GET IN TOUCH WITH THEM. BUT THE RADIO'S COPPED A BULLET AS WELL.


IT WAS LITTLE CONSOLATION TO SEE THE SUPERFORTRESSES POUNDING THE ISLAND WITH HIGH EXPLOSIVE.
THERE MUST BE SOMETHING WE CAN DO. WE CAN'T JUST GIVE UP WITHOUT A STRUGGLE.
I SUPPOSE WE COULDN'T LAND ON THE SEA AND TRY TO REPAIR THE ENGINES? NOPE, THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE.


SUDDENLY MIKE HAD AN IDEA. HE WAS A TRAINED ENGINEER, AND HE SUGGESTED LOOKING AT THE ENGINES.
BUT YOU COULDN'T GET AT THEM. THEY'RE OUTSIDE THE GONDOLA AND WE'RE SEVERAL THOUSAND FEET UP!
IN THE OLD DAYS THEY REPAIRED ENGINES IN FLIGHT. AND I USED TO HAVE A GOOD HEAD FOR HEIGHTS...


SECURING A ROPE AROUND HIS WAIST HE INCHED OUT ONTO THE ENGINE SUPPORT STRUTS. AFTER A FEW MINUTES...
HOW'S IT GOING, MIKE? WE'RE DRIFTING PRETTY FAST, AND IT'LL BE LIGHT IN A FEW HOURS.
ALMOST FINISHED, TOM. FORTUNATELY THERE WASN'T MUCH DAMAGE DONE.
THE JOB COMPLETED, THEY LISTENED HAPPILY AS ONE ENGINE BURST INTO LIFE AT A TOUCH OF THE STARTER.
IT WORKS!
OK, I'LL HAVE A GO AT THE OTHER ONE NOW.

THE SECOND ENGINE WAS MORE TROUBLE, BUT AFTER AN HOUR MIKE DISCOVERED THE FAULT AND PUT IT RIGHT.
WELL DONE! UP YOU COME!
NOW I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A PUPPET ON A STRING!

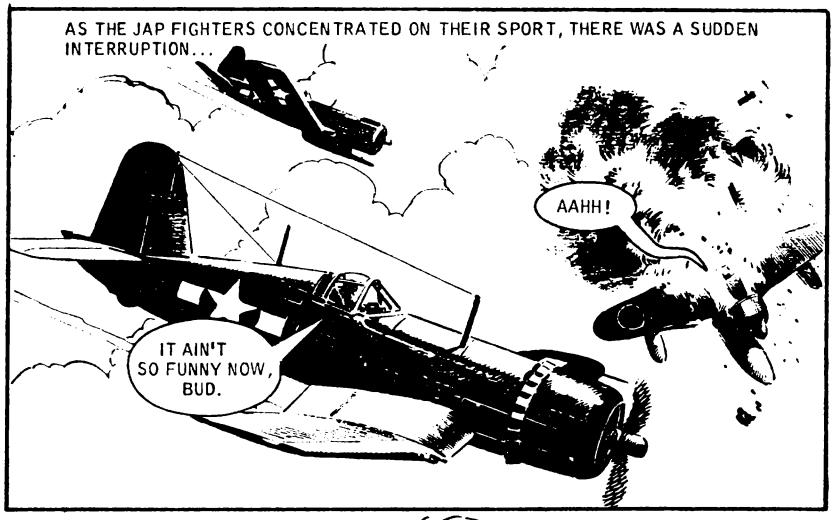

BUT GILROY LOOKED STARTLED AS HE BEGAN TO COIL THE ROPE.
YOU MEAN IT WAS LYING LOOSE? I...ULP...I THOUGHT ONE OF YOU HAD FASTENED IT...
THAT WAS SOME IDEA YOU HAD, MIKE. BUT NEXT TIME TRY FASTENING THE FREE END OF THE ROPE, HUH?

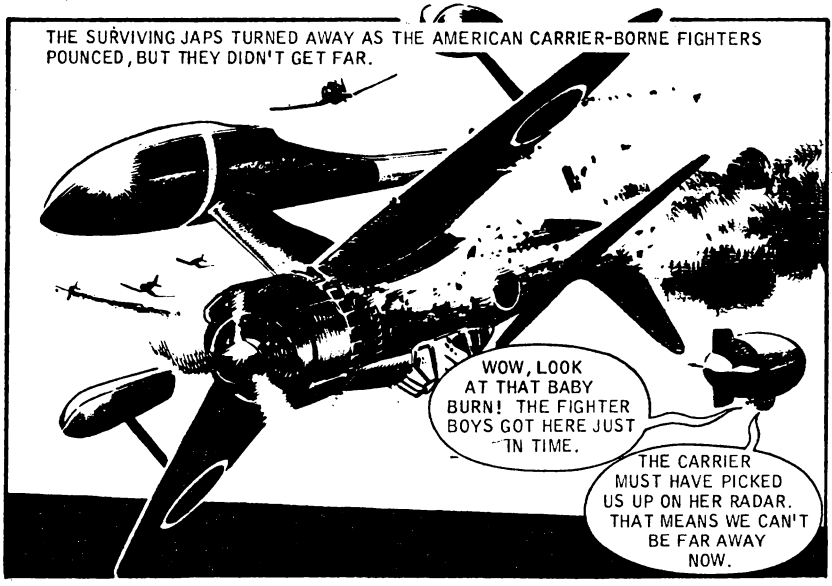
MIKE CERTAINLY NEEDED THE CUP OF COFFEE THAT TOM PRODUCED, BUT THE DAWN REVIVED THEIR SPIRITS.
WE CAN'T BE MUCH MORE THAN AN HOUR FROM THE CARRIER NOW.
THE SOONER WE GET DOWN THE BETTER. I'VE LOST MY HEAD FOR HEIGHTS AFTER LAST NIGHT!

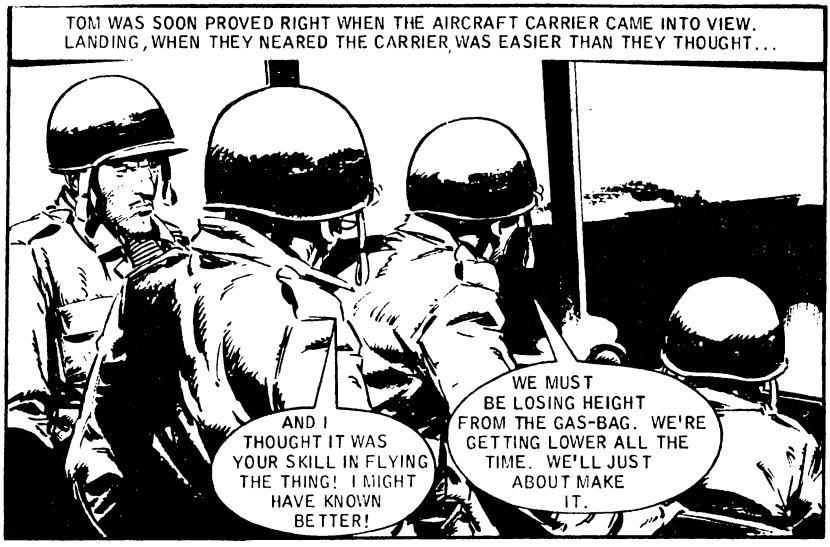
BUT THEIR TROUBLES WERE NOT OVER. FOR WITH THE DAYLIGHT CAME THREE JAP FIGHTERS, SEEKING VENGEANCE.
LOOK, AIRCRAFT! AND WE DON'T NEED TO ASK WHOSE SIDE THEY'RE ON!
AND THERE'S NO WAY WE CAN DODGE THEM.

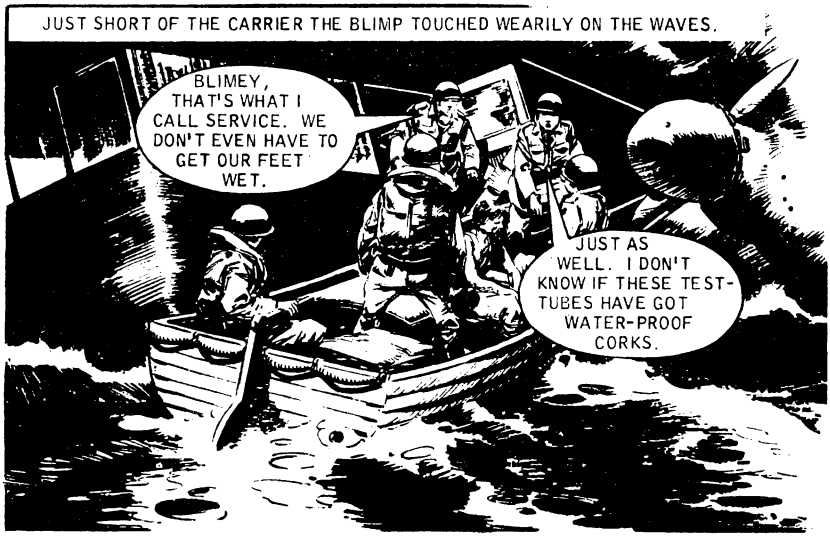
THE JAPANESE FIGHTERS APPROACHED CONFIDENTLY, ENJOYING THEIR RARE OPPORTUNITY.
VERY FEW FIGHTER PILOTS HAVE THE CHANCE TO SHOOT DOWN AN AIR-SHIP. I WILL MAKE THE FIRST ATTACK!

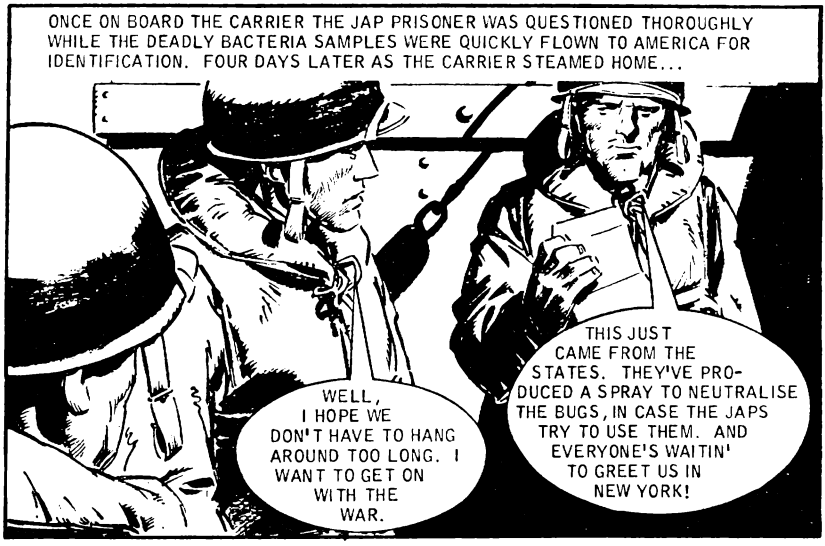
TOM WATCHED HELPLESSLY AS THE FIGHTERS APPROACHED FOR THE KILL.
I'M NOT GOIN' DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT. IF THEY COME CLOSE ENOUGH I'LL BLAST 'EM!
BY THE TIME HE'S WITHIN RANGE WE SHAN'T HAVE ANYTHING HOLDING US UP, COLONEL. BUT I ADMIRE YOUR OPTIMISM.

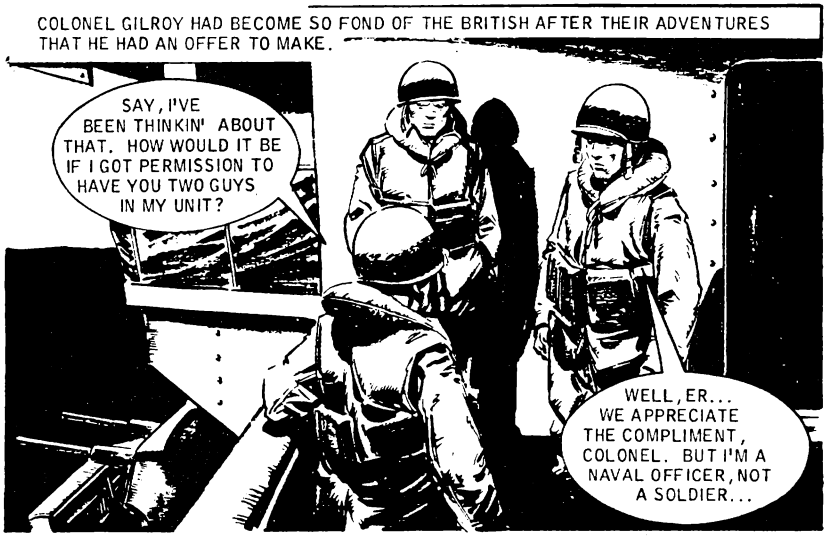

AS THE JAP FIGHTERS CONCENTRATED ON THEIR SPORT, THERE WAS A SUDDEN INTERRUPTION...
AAHH!
IT AIN'T SO FUNNY NOW, BUD.


THE SURVIVING JAPS TURNED AWAY AS THE AMERICAN CARRIER-BORNE FIGHTERS POUNCED, BUT THEY DIDN'T GET FAR.
WOW, LOOK AT THAT BABY BURN! THE FIGHTER BOYS GOT HERE JUST IN TIME.
THE CARRIER MUST HAVE PICKED US UP ON HER RADAR. THAT MEANS WE CAN'T BE FAR AWAY NOW.


TOM WAS SOON PROVED RIGHT WHEN THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER CAME INTO VIEW. LANDING, WHEN THEY NEARED THE CARRIER, WAS EASIER THAN THEY THOUGHT...
AND I THOUGHT IT WAS YOUR SKILL IN FLYING THE THING! I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN BETTER!
WE MUST BE LOSING HEIGHT FROM THE GAS-BAG. WE'RE GETTING LOWER ALL THE TIME. WE'LL JUST ABOUT MAKE IT.


JUST SHORT OF THE CARRIER THE BLIMP TOUCHED WEARILY ON THE WAVES.
BLIMEY, THAT'S WHAT I CALL SERVICE. WE DON'T EVEN HAVE TO GET OUR FEET WET.
JUST AS WELL. I DON'T KNOW IF THESE TEST-TUBES HAVE GOT WATER-PROOF CORKS.


ONCE ON BOARD THE CARRIER THE JAP PRISONER WAS QUESTIONED THOROUGHLY WHILE THE DEADLY BACTERIA SAMPLES WERE QUICKLY FLOWN TO AMERICA FOR IDENTIFICATION. FOUR DAYS LATER AS THE CARRIER STEAMED HOME...
WELL, I HOPE WE DON'T HAVE TO HANG AROUND TOO LONG. I WANT TO GET ON WITH THE WAR.
THIS JUST CAME FROM THE STATES. THEY'VE PRODUCED A SPRAY TO NEUTRALISE THE BUGS, IN CASE THE JAPS TRY TO USE THEM. AND EVERYONE'S WAITIN' TO GREET US IN NEW YORK!


COLONEL GILROY HAD BECOME SO FOND OF THE BRITISH AFTER THEIR ADVENTURES THAT HE HAD AN OFFER TO MAKE.
SAY, I'VE BEEN THINKIN' ABOUT THAT. HOW WOULD IT BE IF I GOT PERMISSION TO HAVE YOU TWO GUYS IN MY UNIT?
WELL, ER... WE APPRECIATE THE COMPLIMENT, COLONEL. BUT I'M A NAVAL OFFICER, NOT A SOLDIER...

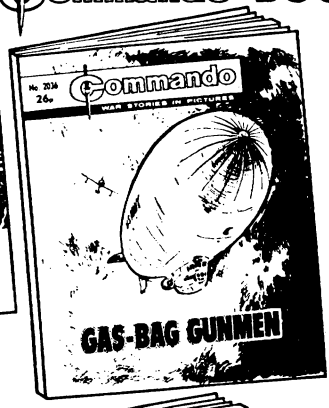
FORTUNATELY NEWS AWAITING THEM WHEN THEY RETURNED TO THE STATES SAVED THEM FROM THE EMBARRASSMENT OF REFUSING GILROY'S OFFER. THE ATOM BOMB HAD PUT AN END TO ANY CHANCE OF THE JAPANESE USING THEIR NEW AND DEADLY GERM WEAPON. BUT THANKS TO TOM AND HIS COMPANIONS IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN THE SHATTERING SURPRISE THEY INTENDED.

Don't forget — four more explosive Commando books are out in just two weeks! Keep your eyes peeled for:—

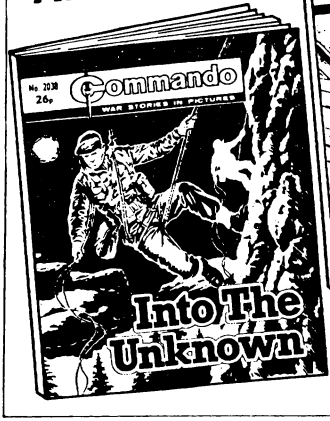
"HERE WE GO AGAIN!"
"SUB VERSUS SUB"
"THE UNLIKELY HERO"
"A TIME FOR REVENGE"

FOUR WINNERS—

THAT'S THESE LATEST Commando BOOKS!



EACH PAGE IS PACKED WITH ACTION AND ADVENTURE.



NOW YOU'VE GOT ONE, GO GET THE OTHERS—

TODAY!

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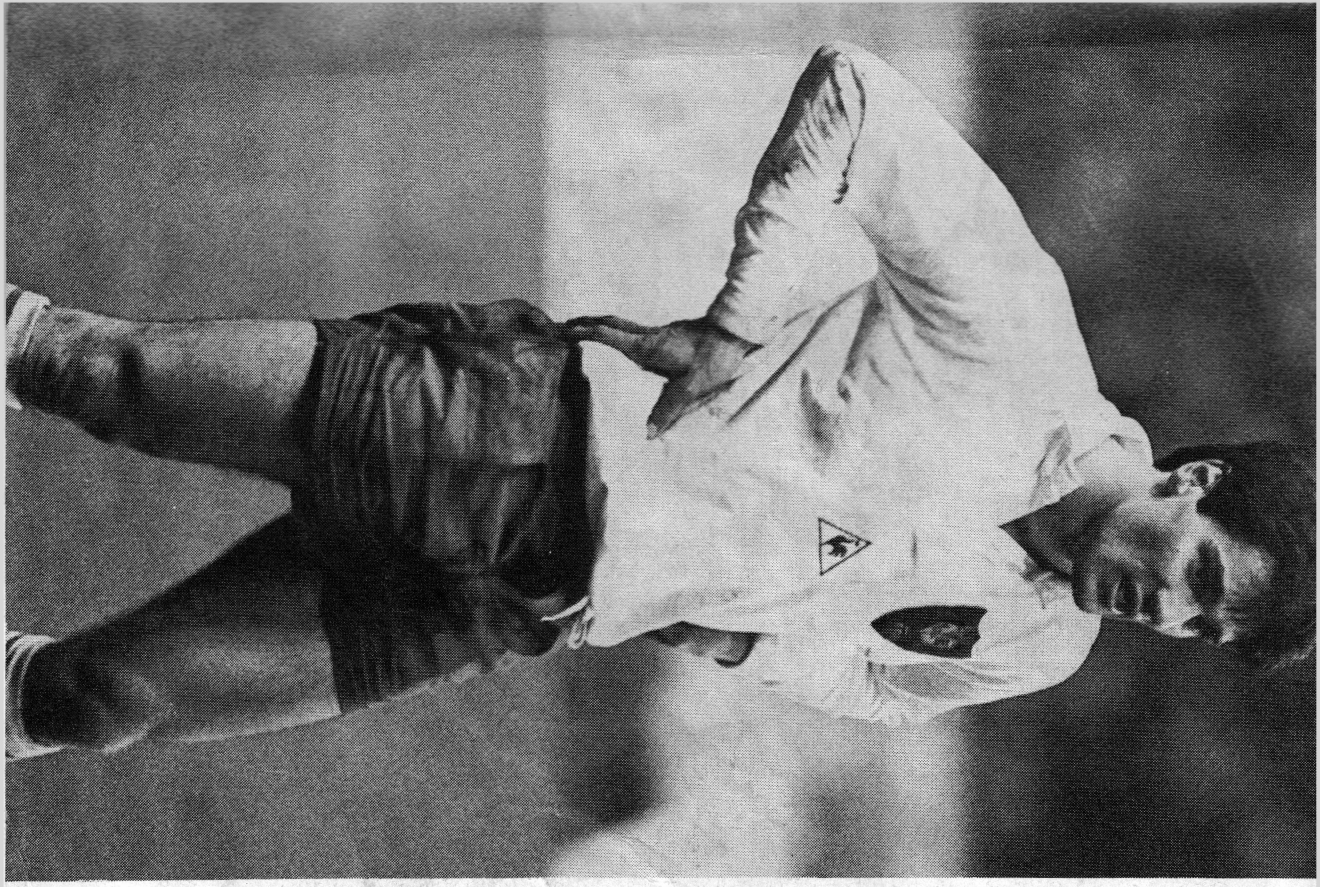

Stars of Rugby Union — Jean-Baptiste Lafond

GAS-BAG GUNMEN

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Commando